Abstract: Modern readers too often and easily misread modern assumptions into ancient texts. One such notion is that when the reader encounters repeated stories in the Bible, the Book of Mormon, Herodotus, or numerous other texts, the obvious explanation that requires no supporting argument is that one text is plagiarizing or copying from the other. Ancient readers and writers viewed such repetitions differently. In this article, I examine the narratives of a young woman or girl dancing for a king with the promise from the ruler that whatever the dancer wants, she can request and receive; the request often entails a beheading. Some readers argue that a story in Ether 8 and 9, which has such a dance followed by a decapitation, is plagiarized from the gospels of Mark and Matthew: the narrative of the incarceration and death of John the Baptist. The reader of such repeated stories must study with a mindset more sympathetic to the conceptual world of antiquity in which such stories claim to be written. Biblical and Book of Mormon writers viewed such repetitions as the way God works in history, for Nephi asserts that "the course of the Lord is one eternal round" (1 Nephi 10:19), a claim he makes barely after summarizing his father's vision of the tree of life, a dream he will repeat, expand upon, and make his own in 1 Nephi chapters 11–15 (and just because it is developed as derivative from his father's dream in some way, no reader suggests it be taken as a plagiaristic borrowing). Nephi's worldview is part of the shared mental system illustrated by his eponymous ancestor — Joseph, who gave his name to the two tribes of Joseph: Ephraim and Manasseh, the latter through which Lehi traced his descent (Alma 10:3) — for youthful Joseph boasts two dreams of his ascendance over his family members, interprets the two dreams of his fellow inmates, and articulates the meaning of Pharaoh's two dreams, followed by his statement of meaning regarding such repetitions: "And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass" (Genesis 41:32).

The Dance of Reader and Text: Salomé, the Daughter of Jared, and the Regal Dance of Death

Alan Goff

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Abstract: *Modern readers too often and easily misread modern assumptions into ancient texts. One such notion is that when the reader encounters repeated stories in the Bible, the Book of Mormon, Herodotus, or numerous other texts, the obvious explanation that requires no supporting argument is that one text is plagiarizing or copying from the other. Ancient readers and writers viewed such repetitions differently. In this article, I examine the narratives of a young woman or girl dancing for a king with the promise from the ruler that whatever the dancer wants, she can request and receive; the request often entails a beheading. Some readers argue that a story in Ether 8 and 9, which has such a dance followed by a decapitation, is plagiarized from the gospels of Mark and Matthew: the narrative of the incarceration and death of John the Baptist. The reader of such repeated stories must study with a mindset more sympathetic to the conceptual world of antiquity in which such stories claim to be written. Biblical and Book of Mormon writers viewed such repetitions as the way God works in history, for Nephi asserts that "the course of the Lord is one eternal round" (1 Nephi 10:19), a claim he makes barely after summarizing his father's vision of the tree of life, a dream he will repeat, expand upon, and make his own in 1 Nephi chapters 11–15 (and just because it is developed as derivative from his father's dream in some way, no reader suggests it be taken as a plagiaristic borrowing). Nephi's worldview is part of the shared mental system illustrated by his eponymous ancestor — Joseph, who gave his name to the two tribes of Joseph: Ephraim and Manasseh, the latter through which Lehi traced his descent (Alma 10:3) — for youthful Joseph boasts two dreams of his ascendance over his family members, interprets the two dreams of his fellow inmates, and articulates the meaning of Pharaoh's two dreams, followed by his statement of meaning regarding such*

repetitions: *"And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass" (Genesis 41:32).*

> O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
> How can we know the dancer from the dance?
> W. B. Yeats "Among the Schoolchildren"

Vast changes have transformed all disciplines in the more than 75 years since Fawn Brodie published her biography of Joseph Smith in 1945. Historians then confidently asserted the attainment of disciplinary objectivity, of the ability to discard all ideological commitment and reveal the past "as it actually happened" free of all literary embellishment and preconceptions, and of the ability to do history scientifically. The other discipline most relevant to my discussion is biblical criticism; biblical critics (closely linked to the historical discipline) also asserted that their field had become scientific over the previous century and freed their approach from the ideological pollution of religious and theological allegiances, permitting the disciplinary expert the same level of objectivity as their closely aligned historical cousins. The commitments to notions of objectivity and positivism that buttressed these theoretical positions have been devastatingly critiqued since the 1970s, although they are still uncritically held by most disciplinary practitioners in not just history and biblical criticism but all intellectual fields in the sciences, social sciences, and humanities.

Brodie's biography of Joseph Smith, *No Man Knows My History*, articulated a particular reading of the Book of Mormon that is still influential and often cited to support a specific-but-dated conception of Book of Mormon narrative. Here is the passage persistently quoted to denigrate the scripture as a cheap plagiarism of biblical narrative: "Many stories [Joseph Smith] 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."[1] These 72 words established a reading agenda that, although not unusual in 1940s academic contexts where

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1. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1982), 62–63.

religious phenomena were studied, has been superseded by more recent developments in scholarship of biblical and Book of Mormon narrative along with historical theory.

In this article, I respond to the first of those themes that Brodie asserts Joseph Smith stole from the Bible. This piece is part of a much larger project. I have researched and written about each of these five Book of Mormon passages Brodie asserts Smith pilfered from the Bible, no credit given, as the best evidence that Joseph Smith was a conscious religious charlatan and the Book of Mormon produced by a talented storyteller but ignorant farmer as a novelistic invention. I have already published the first of those five compositions listed below. This is the second of five:

- "Alma's Prophetic Commissioning Type Scene"[2] demonstrates that when Brodie argues Smith plagiarized the story of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus in what is often called "Alma's conversion story," such an interpretation vastly underreads both stories of prophetic calling. The New and Old Testaments contain stories of prophetic commissioning that follow this model of a prophet being called to cry repentance and salvation: Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and many others. Reading the Alma and Saul/Paul type scenes as standing in a long line of predecessor narratives fundamentally alters their meaning. If the Alma narrative is stolen from Paul's story, then the exact same charge should be (and has been) made against the story of Paul's conversion to Christianity (and St. Augustine's, and so on): that it isn't historical because the contours of the story are too much like previous narratives. Such a view completely misunderstands the role of repetition in biblical narrative and the continuing legacy of such conversion/commissioning stories in the history of converts to the biblical tradition.
- In the present article, I appeal to research on folklore and oral history to enumerate the decapitation narratives in the Bible, Greek and Roman history, and other classical sources. Brodie's tracing of influence from the Book of Mormon story of a young woman dancing to obtain

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2. Alan Goff, "Alma's Prophetic Commissioning Type Scene," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 51 (2022): 115–64, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/almas-prophetic-commissioning-type-scene/.

a beheading solely to the story of Salomé and John the Baptist ignores the frequency of the theme in antiquity and the superficiality of asserting the fictional status of such common motifs in ancient narrative. It also questions Brodie's construal of the motif's meaning.

- In "Deciphering God's Graffiti: Reading Strategies Weighed and Measured,"[3] I discuss the story of Amulek preaching at Ammonihah; he begins by declaring his genealogy, which includes Aminadi "who interpreted the writing which was upon the wall of the temple, which was written by the finger of God" (Alma 10:2). Instinctively, Brodie asserts that this story was stolen from the biblical book of Daniel. I show how ancient Hebraic narrative would not be Hebraic if one of its principal features weren't included: repeated stories that allude to and recapitulate earlier and later narratives reiterating the same themes by demonstrating that what happens to ancestors is repeated in the lives of their descendants and sometimes in their progenitors. Amulek (like Daniel, Joseph, and Esther) is an Israelite placed in a foreign court while maintaining worship of the God of Abraham, so his narrative is connected to those biblical examples that it takes for granted and especially alludes to the story of Joseph in Egypt, whom Amulek also specifically mentions as his forebear.

- In "The Plagiary of the Daughters of the Lamanites,"[4] I take up another narrative that Brodie asserts Smith lifted from the Bible. In Judges 21, the Israelites encourage the surviving remnant of the tribe of Benjamin to kidnap and marry the daughters of Shiloh. Mosiah 20 has the priests of King Noah abduct the daughters of the Lamanites for a similar purpose. I demonstrate that in antiquity these abduction-for-marriage narratives were ubiquitous (and continue in contemporary societies in certain parts of the world). Considering the Hebrew Bible's penchant for repeating narrative motifs — such as kidnappings (for

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3. Alan Goff, "Deciphering God's Graffiti: Reading Strategies Weighed and Measured," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* (forthcoming).

4. Alan Goff, "The Plagiary of the Daughters of the Lamanites," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* (forthcoming).

example, as the Romans' abduction of the daughters of the Sabines in order to provide wives and an alliance in hostile new territory) — provides a better explanation of the repetitions than concepts such as plagiarism crudely used and ideologically advanced.

- Brodie also asserts that the Book of Mormon story of Ammon defending sheep at the waters of Sebus with a sword and sling is a knockoff of the biblical David-and-Goliath narrative. In the article "Drawing from Deep Wells in the Deserts of Modernity: Hebraic Narrative Conventions and Modern Reading Deficiencies,"[5] I demonstrate the complex web of allusion to other biblical narratives in the David story, and then I extend that principle and reading to the story of Ammon at the waters of Sebus. With such a reading taking into account the pervasive habit of using allusion and intertextuality in Hebraic narrative, I point out that a superficial reading as that provided by Brodie can't be sustained. Such attention to this habit of allusion and metalepsis in biblical narrative was advanced in studies of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament only since the 1980s, so decades after Brodie articulated her theory of reading the Bible and Book of Mormon. Her obsolete readings are severely deficient when placed alongside interpretations that take into account much more complex textual relationships than mere plagiarism.

Brodie's interpretations of Book of Mormon narrative and her readings of specific passages have achieved influence out of proportion to their quality, principally because outside its circle of believers, the scripture has attained no notable alternative scholarly or academic theories and approaches. Brodie's framework has merely been repeated by a descendancy of skeptical readers in a way that Brodie herself should have disdained in order to maintain consistency (they have merely "borrowed" from her rather than from the Bible). I here propose my notion of repetition in Hebraic narrative as such a replacement.

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5. Alan Goff, "Drawing from Deep Wells in the Deserts of Modernity: Hebraic Narrative Conventions and Modern Reading Deficiencies," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* (forthcoming).

Fawn Brodie's Reading of Biblical and Book of Mormon Narrative Involving Dancing, Kings, and Decollation

That the Book of Mormon contains biblical repetitions is indisputable, but what do those twice- and thrice-told tales mean? The significance is at least partially supplied by the reader. Emerson asserted that good readers make good texts.[6] I disagree, at least in part, but I think more agreeable would be to assert that bad readers can produce bad readings even of good texts, and no guarantee exists that good readers can do much with bad texts. When bad readers engage a text, one would take great risks making judgments about the text under examination from the resulting reading, but to produce a good reading of strong, well-considered, and well-constructed texts, a good reader is a necessary, though not sufficient, element.

Here, again, is the first of Brodie's five claims in what has become the cornerstone of Book of Mormon criticisms: "Many stories [Joseph Smith] borrowed from the Bible. The daughter of Jared, like Salome, danced before a king and a decapitation followed."[7] Brodie claims Smith stole from the gospels the story of Salomé dancing for the Baptist's head. I determined in the 1980s to research Brodie's plagiarism claims to see how well they withstand scrutiny, and although they are oft cited (and rarely critiqued), they don't measure up. Another Book of Mormon revisionist has asserted the following:

> 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

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6. Emerson's wording directly: "'Tis the good reader that makes the good book; a good head cannot read amiss, in every book he finds passages which seem confidences or asides hidden from all else and unmistakably meant for his ear." We talk about texts today rather than books or authors after the death of the author, even one as quotable as Emerson. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Success* (1870, repr., Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1912), 30, https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=WvZmtSPauxEC&oi=fnd&pg=PA30.

7. Brodie, *No Man*, 62–63.

it, certain problems concerning traditional understandings of the book stand out.[8]

This very plagiarism assertion is a preconceived notion. In the 1990s, I determined to find discussions of the death of the Baptist, searching years in research libraries such as BYU's, NYU's, SUNY Albany's, and many smaller ones in the Hudson River Valley. Later, after moving to Arizona, I was in the ASU library stacks and glanced down to see Roger Aus's book *Water into Wine and the Beheading of John the Baptist*. I had even checked out that book years earlier while doing dissertation research about Jesus's miracle at Cana without noticing its relevance to the beheading of John (the relevant clue was right there in Aus's title, such was my own incapacity at the time as a reader). From that discovery, I quickly found other relevant sources making this article possible. Sometimes pondering and years of consideration are required before research comes together, before I could respond to Brodie's 14 words: "the daughter of Jared, like Salome, danced before a king and a decapitation followed." Here is Ham's pilfered version of Brodie's charge: "Other apparent biblical allusions in the **Book of Mormon** include … the daughter of Jared, like Salome, dancing for the king in return for a decapitation."[9]

The relevant Book of Mormon and Bible passages follow:

> Now the daughter of Jared being exceedingly expert, and seeing the sorrows of her father, thought to devise a plan whereby she could redeem the kingdom unto her father.

> **Now the daughter of Jared was exceedingly fair.** And it came to pass that she did talk with her father, and said unto him: Whereby hath my father so much sorrow? Hath he not read the record which our fathers brought across the great deep? Behold, is there not an account concerning them of old, that they by their secret plans did obtain kingdoms and great glory?

> And now, therefore, let my father send for Akish, the son of Kimnor; and **behold, I am fair, and I will dance before him, and I will please him, that he will desire me to wife; wherefore if he shall desire of thee that ye shall give unto**

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8. Wayne Ham, "Problems in Interpreting the Book of Mormon as History," *Courage: A Journal of History, Thought and Action* 1, no.1 (Sept. 1970): 16.

9. Ham, "Problems," 22n8.

him me to wife, then shall ye say: I will give her if ye will bring unto me the head of my father, the king.

And now Omer was a friend to Akish; wherefore, when Jared had sent for Akish, **the daughter of Jared danced before him that she pleased him**, insomuch that he desired her to wife. And it came to pass that he said unto Jared: Give her unto me to wife.

And Jared said unto him: **I will give her unto you, if ye will bring unto me the head of my father, the king.**

And it came to pass that Akish gathered in unto the house of Jared all his kinsfolk, and said unto them: Will ye swear unto me that ye will be faithful unto me in the thing which I shall desire of you?

And it came to pass that they all sware unto him, by the God of heaven, and also by the heavens, and also by the earth, and by their heads, that whoso should vary from the assistance which Akish desired should lose his head; and whoso should divulge whatsoever thing Akish made known unto them, the same should lose his life. …

And the Lord warned Omer in a dream that he should depart out of the land; wherefore Omer departed out of the land with his family. …

And it came to pass that Jared was anointed king over the people, by the hand of wickedness; and he gave unto Akish his daughter to wife.

And it came to pass that Akish sought the life of his father-in-law; and he applied unto those whom he had sworn by the oath of the ancients, and **they obtained the head of his father-in-law, as he sat upon his throne, giving audience to his people.**

For so great had been the spreading of this wicked and secret society that it had corrupted the hearts of all the people; **therefore Jared was murdered upon his throne, and Akish reigned in his stead.** (Ether 8: 8–14, 9:3–6)

Note here that the Jaredite story is not a narrative of private revenge motivated by personal hatred and offense but one of ambition and intrigue driven by political aspiration and succession to kingship. It is

one chain link in a sequence of shackling subnarratives in the Jaredite record with kings being overthrown or imprisoned to satisfy ambition and greed. The story of the Baptist's death is, on the other hand, one of personal animus and retribution:

> For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her.
>
> For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife.
>
> Therefore Herodias had a quarrel against him, and would have killed him; but she could not:
>
> For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.
>
> And when a convenient day was come, that **Herod on his birthday made a supper to his lords**, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee;
>
> **And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee.**
>
> And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, **I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom.**
>
> And she went forth, and said unto her mother, **What shall I ask? And she said, The head of John the Baptist.**
>
> And she came in straightway with haste unto the king, and asked, saying, I will that thou **give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist**.
>
> And the king was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her.
>
> And immediately **the king sent an executioner, and commanded his head to be brought: and he went and beheaded him in the prison,**
>
> And brought **his head in a charger, and gave it to the damsel**: and the damsel gave it to her mother. (Mark 6:17–28 [Matthew 14 is the parallel text])

Here, Herod Antipas makes the princely promise after Salomé dances. Prompted by Herodias, Salomé demands John's life. Reluctantly, Antipas relents and executes him.

Repetition of History and Narrative in Biblical Textuality

Unstated in Brodie/Ham is the premise that a motif present in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon means Joseph Smith stole it. This approach unnecessarily narrows the interpretive possibilities, assuming that history is linear and that repetitions or circularities indicate fictional narrative shaping.

> One of the most powerful arguments for historiography being regarded as a discourse which is quite different from mere "literature" is that historical texts are prone to be treated in a quite different way from "literary" ones. They seem to be automatically subject to either refutation or verification. Nobody, it is maintained, would bother to challenge the truthfulness of a work of fiction.

> There is nothing *inherent* in historical texts to evoke such reactions. A text's genre is constituted to some extent by our knowledge (or presumed knowledge) of the climate that produces it and of the audience it is designed for: a history book or a factual journal is subject to refutation because we happen to know in the first place that it is purported to be true.[10]

Heinrich Schliemann rediscovered the ruins of ancient Troy because he assumed some historical content in Homer's epics. A reader wouldn't go to the effort and expense Schliemann did to look in English digs for archaeological evidence of Connecticut resident Hank Morgan's unsuccessful attempt to prevent King Arthur's death. A main difference between historical and literary texts is how their readers read them, and to read is to enter the hermeneutical circle — one would hope not in a viciously circular way. Treat repetitions like fictions, and they look like fictions. Invest in a theory of history that sees events being repeated in later generations and eras, and the reader is likely to find evidence for such historical connections. If the reader precludes by presupposition the eruption of the divine in history, that reader will likely attribute narratives

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10. Andrew Laird, "Fiction, Bewitchment and Story Worlds: The Implications of Claims to Truth in Apuleius," *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World*, ed. Christopher Gill and T. P. Wiseman (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1993), 160.

about such events to the imagination of the writer. Presuppositions proscribe and authorize particular interpretations.

The Bible uses elements that appear to the modern mind to be fictional, including "recurrent motifs and phrases, and analogies of incident, and to define the meaning of the events through allusion, metaphor, and symbol." To conclude fictionality just because the text incorporates these features is mistaken: "The writer does all this not to fabricate history but in order to understand it."[11] Elizabeth Fenton, a professor of literature rather than of history and not a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,[12] reads the Book of Mormon with more nuance compared to other outsider perspectives. Such subtlety permits her to recognize that repetition is itself meaningful, not an occasion to dismiss the book. The Book of Mormon's "engagement with biblical texts … complicates the very notion of an ur-text and offers a model of sacred history that depends upon iteration and proliferation."[13] Adam Gopnik is decidedly more representative of the interpretive reading quality the Book of Mormon is commonly subject to.[14] He repeats the conventional attitude toward the book in academic, media, and other sectarian circles and then echoes Mark Twain: "Scholarly opinion on Smith now tends to divide between those who think that he knew he was making it up and those who think that he sincerely believed in his own visions — though the truth is that, as Melville's 'Confidence Man' reminds us, the line between the seer and scamster wasn't clearly marked in early nineteenth-century America." For a reader who faults the scripture for being repetitious, Gopnik then oddly repeats Twain's pronouncement from *Roughing It* that the Nephite record is "a prosy detail of imaginary history, with the Old Testament for a model; followed by a tedious

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11.   Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), xvii–xviii.

12.   Fawn Brodie, by the way, received her master's degree in English, rather than history, although she was later a professor of history at UCLA, and her biographical writings exhibit a strong literary quality. One would think that with that literary background, she would have been more sensitive to the literary texture in Book of Mormon narrative.

13.   Elizabeth Fenton, "Open Canons: Sacred History and American History in *The Book of Mormon*," *J19: The Journal of Nineteenth-Century Americanists* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 343.

14.   Adam Gopnick, "I, Nephi: Mormonism and Its Meanings," *The New Yorker* (August 13, 2012), https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/08/13/i-nephi. Gopnick's occasion is to comment on Mitt Romney's belief system as he was the Republican Party's nominee in the year's U.S. presidential election.

plagiarism of the New Testament." Brodie stands in the mainstream of critics who read the text badly because she gets the first connection right that the scripture Smith brought forth demonstrates constant reliance on the Bible while she adopts the mistaken modern prejudice against repetition that biblical textuality constantly exhibits.

That the Book of Mormon repeats biblical episodes and narrative contours is the principal criticism of the book in the long historical arc from Alexander Campbell to Mark Twain, to Fawn Brodie, to Adam Gopnick. That biblical feature, so the argument goes, is the central evidence that the record couldn't have been composed by antique Hebraic historians but must be a novelistic composition produced by a crude, frontier, antebellum farmer, little schooled in the Bible or any formal education. Yet the text doesn't merely copy the Bible. It cites it in such a way that something entirely new emerges, complicating notions of derivation and source, even challenging the preeminence of the Bible as it reopens the canon to engage a greater abundance of prophetic texts in conversation with each other and sometimes in competition, as Fenton notes.

Gopnick's, Twain's, and Brodie's criticisms of the Book of Mormon are quite durable. When he wrote in *Roughing It* (published in 1872, narrating his journeys through the West between 1861 and 1867) about his two-day visit in 1861 to Salt Lake City when traveling to his brother's appointment as secretary of the nascent Nevada Territory, Samuel Clemens had to write his brother to refresh his memory of Salt Lake City and Brigham Young, with whom they had an audience. Twain told his brother that the author remembered virtually nothing of the visit, yet he was able to craft sufficient zingers about the residents and their leader to provide a few good laughs by drawing upon common stereotypes of the Latter-day Saints held during the Gilded Age. His comments on the Book of Mormon demonstrate a passing acquaintance with the scripture, and his clever criticisms were mainly that the book was boring and a flagrant repetition of the Bible, basically the same as Brodie's and Gopnick's denigrations except sprinkled with shrewd humor.

Folklore, History, and Genre

Folklore has a similar status to literary (and in this instance, by *literary* I mean "fictional") motifs for historians. The dancing girl requesting a decapitation is unquestionably a folkloristic (oral history) theme. Schildgen notes the strong similarities between the biblical Esther and Salomé stories: "The Esther story, like the John the Baptist episode,

deploys a number of folklore motifs: a corrupt and ineffectual king, opulent court life, manipulative or treacherous villains, innocent male and female victims, and an impossible situation." Further, she notes from Stith Thompson's folklore motif index several of such themes present in both stories: "the rash oath, or blind promise … in which a wish is granted before the grantor knows what the request or its consequences might be."[15] Betsworth states that Salomé is an "anti-type of another biblical girl, Esther" and notes the parallels between the two narratives.[16] Baert writes that the motifs of "'beheading' and 'dancing'" present in the John/Salomé narrative have had "an incalculable impact on both exegesis and art history" because these elements are so "freighted with anthropological gender archetypes,"[17] and not just after Caravaggio, Titian, and Wilde, but even in antiquity; the storylines are archetypal and that exemplary status accounts for their occurrence and reoccurrence in many different cultures and places. Similar to literary motifs and historical writing, no firm line separates historical and oral historical themes.

Conventional Motifs in History and Folkloristic History

Under the term "stock situations," Bacon refers to "conventional, repeated situations readily recognized by readers or audiences as 'usual' or 'trite,' though they may be given fresh treatment. They are to situations what flat characters are to characterization. The rise of the poor boy from log cabin to White House is a stock situation in American lore."[18] When nominated to head the presidential ticket at the Democratic National Convention in 1992, Bill Clinton's Hollywood friends produced a film, *The Man from Hope*.[19] It played on this stock theme: the improbable rise of a boy from a poor, broken family in Hope, Arkansas, to occupy the White House. To conclude that because this story was conventionally framed (and really, can a small town called Hope actually be historical rather than a symbolic projection upon a nostalgic past? Isn't it too much

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15. Brenda Deen Schildgen, "A Blind Promise: Mark's Retrieval of Esther," *Poetics Today* 15, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 122.

16. Sharon Betsworth, *The Reign of God Is Such as These: A Socio-Literary Analysis in the Gospel of Mark* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 124–25.

17. Barbara Baert, "The Dancing Daughter and the Head of John the Baptist (Mark 6:14–29) Revisited: An Interdisciplinary Approach," *Louvain Studies* 38 (2014): 6.

18. Wallace A. Bacon, *The Art of Interpretation* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), 385.

19. Clintonlibrary42, "The Man from Hope (1992) [Reuploaded]," YouTube Video, 17:04, August 28, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrujaQDlN28.

to believe that something good could come from Nazareth? To which I answer, "Come and see"), Clinton is nonhistorical, fictional, would be mistaken. Central to folklore is repetition: of symbols, words, and themes.[20] Repetitious motifs define folklore. "To identify or label a verbal account as folklore says nothing one way or the other as to the historicity of that account. Some folklore is historically accurate: some is not. Each instance has to be examined on an individual basis."[21]

Biblical critics have explored biblical oral tradition. Much of that research sought historical kernels behind the stories. When biblical critics find a folklore theme, they too often dismiss the narrative through commitment to a nineteenth-century positivistic notion of history.[22] Oral narrative requires the reader to think differently, to pose different questions of ancient stories in an epoch of virtually universal literacy. Decades of research into the connections between folklore and the biblical text have led to a widespread consensus that "the Bible has oral antecedents, but there is little agreement on the extent to which oral composition and transmission have actually left their mark on the text or the degree to which one might be able to establish this lineage."[23] Oral history and related folkloristic storytelling are propagated person to person around hearthstones and firesides, generationally from elders to youngsters, and only occasionally survive the transition from oral to literate culture:

> The issue of the *historical* Jesus is of no import to the tellers and hearers of stories. The modern stance which separates "authentic" from "inauthentic" words or searches for the "real" Jesus behind texts is alien to oral mentality. Stories and sayings are authenticated not by virtue of their historical reliability, but on the authority of the speaker and by the reception of hearers. This must not suggest that orality has lost all rapport with actuality. But it means from the perspective of language that if Jesus is to be continued in the hearts and

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20. Susan Niditch, *Folklore and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 9–10.

21. Alan Dundes, *Holy Writ as Oral Lit: The Bible as Folklore* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), 10–11.

22. Niditch, *Folklore*, 24–25.

23. Robert C. Culley, "Oral Tradition and Biblical Studies," *Oral Tradition* 1, no. 1 (1986): 56.

minds of people, then he must be filtered through the oral medium.[24]

And that medium is concerned with narrative reality rather than historical reality. We moderns can't help but make such distinctions because we live after Western cultures developed historical consciousness, but we ought to recognize potential distortions to ancient texts that make them mean something vastly different than they meant in earlier times and cultures. At the least, we ought to recognize how our modern habits of thought impact the resulting meaning drawn out of the texts.

History Is as Much a Literary Genre as Folklore Is

In folklore studies, a controversial issue is the relationship between oral tradition and history with, predictably, some dismissing folklore as a source of reliable historical information.[25] Oral tradition and historical reliability are complexly related. The standard position is that oral accounts can maintain historical reliability for a maximum of 150 years before being committed to writing. Over longer periods the accounts must be considered fictional.[26] The researcher should be cautious about the facile claim that one can tell the historical reliability of a story just from its form; a story that has folkloristic or literary qualities cannot, on the basis of that genre alone, tell us whether it is historically trustworthy.[27]

The Bible is partly based on oral tradition,[28] so exploring its orality is helpful in understanding it. But to say that the gospels have folkloristic elements says nothing about their historicity. This is to enter "what Richard Dorson calls 'The battle over the historicity of oral tradition.'"[29] Some folklore is clearly ahistorical, but other oral traditions assert historicity. "There is a large realm of mental experience which is quite 'true' but to which the crude dichotomy between fiction and history does not apply."[30] This is particularly so with material produced before the modern false dichotomy of history/fiction emerged to dominate

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24. Werner Kelber, *The Oral and Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 71.

25. Richard M. Dorson, *Folklore: Selected Essays* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 199–202.

26. Patricia G. Kirkpatrick, *The Old Testament and Folklore Study* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988), 102–104.

27. Ibid., 106–107.

28. Derek Brewer, "The Gospels and the Laws of Folktale," *Folklore* 90 (1979): 37.

29. Ibid., 39.

30. Ibid., 39–40.

evaluations of narrative: "Before the 17th century in our modern Western culture, there was much less consciousness of a fixed division between fact and fiction. History, imaginative perception and fiction merged into each other quite easily,"[31] and this is particularly true of folklore.

Greek and Roman Intertexts Comparable to the Salomé Narrative

This Salomé theme emerges out of folklore in many cultures.[32] (Note that although I use the name *Salom*é to refer to this character, she is not named in the gospel of Mark or Matthew; we get her name from Josephus's account of the Herod Antipas household, and Josephus and the gospels tell quite different versions of the death-of-John-the-Baptist vignette.) Zagona notes its pre-Christian roots, seeing similarities to older Latin stories of decollation: "While the New Testament is generally regarded as the initial source of the Herodias-Salome legend, there is reason to believe that the somewhat grisly aspects of them actually had their origins before the Christian era. One theory is that they originated in Rome during the second century before Christ."[33] Zagona refers to Roman stories about Flamininus in Cicero and Plutarch.

Plutarch discusses Lucius Flamininus, a vulgar Roman consul who died in 170 b.c., making the theme chronologically prior to New Testament narratives. This story has many elements of the Salomé/John story:

> He kept as a companion a boy whom he used to carry about with him, not only when he had troops under his charge, but even when the care of a province was committed to him. One day at a drinking-bout, when the youngster was wantoning with Lucius, "I love you, sir, so dearly," said he, "that preferring your satisfaction to my own, I came away without seeing the

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31. Ibid., 40.

32. Hugh Nibley has discussed the Salomé incident in *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites*, *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Vol. 5*, ed. John Welch, Darrell L. Matthews, and Stephen R. Callister (Salt Lake: Desert Book, 1988), 210–13; he even mentions its folkloristic background. Here he says that "the whole point of this story is that it is highly unoriginal. It is supposed to be" (212). He refers to this Jaredite story as a succession narrative with "the ritual of the dancing princess (represented by the *salme* priestess of the Babylonians, hence the name of *Salome*) who wins the heart of a stranger and induces him to marry her, behead the old king, and mount the throne" (213).

33. Helen Grace Zagona, *The Legend of Salome and the Principle of Art for Art's Sake* (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1960), 14–15.

gladiators, though I have never seen a man killed in my life." Lucius, delighted with what the boy said, answered, "Let not that trouble you; I can satisfy that longing," and with that orders a condemned man to be fetched out of the prison, and the executioner to be sent for, and commands him to strike off the man's head, before they rose from the table, Valerius Antias only so far varies the story as to make it a woman for whom he did it.[34]

Bach notes the similarities between the Flamininus story and the Salomé story. "Plutarch's summary story may be of particular interest to readers tracing the Salomé legend because of the appearance of similar tropes in both versions," including drunkenness, desire, vulgar pleasures, violation of moral standards, a murder in the feasting hall, and a pleased lover:

> [T]he two versions reflect similar tropes: both men were killed to satisfy a need of the ruler to please a young figure of desire. The order of death is not related to any actual crime by the victim. While the biblical text does not indicate that Salomé and Herod had any sort of sexual involvement, he accedes to her wish because she has pleased him and he wishes to please her. In the classical story the consul Flaminius wants to please his lover. Pleasure in both cases overrules justice. Similarly each sexual story overwrites the political one.[35]

Roman texts aren't the only potential literary sources for this theme. Herodotus relates a story (9:108–113) broadly similar to the Esther and Salomé narratives; perhaps Matthew and Mark plagiarized from Herodotus. Xerxes, king of Persia, desires a "young girl" (Araÿnte) but can't have her, so he marries her to his son. Amestris, Xerxes' wife, weaves him a beautiful garment he wears for a liaison with Araÿnte. Pleased, he grants her a princely promise — anything she wants. She asks for the mantle. Xerxes foresees trouble, so he offers cities, gold, armies. She declines all other prizes. Amestris hears that Araÿnte has the mantle. As in the Salomé story, Xerxes throws a banquet and grants wishes. Amestris requests (on the king's birthday, he cannot refuse requests) that Araÿnte's mother be turned over to her (assuming the mother to be

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34. Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, trans. John Dryden (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), 462. This story is in the "Life of Flamininus."

35. Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 214–15.

the source of the humiliation); she commands that her rival's mother's breasts and tongue be amputated.[36] Xerxes is the Persian name of this ruler, but he is likely Ahasuerus in the Hebrew Bible, particularly in the Esther story.

The most improbable aspects of John's decapitation story, Derrett asserts, are paralleled in Herodotus and Athenaeus (the latter the author of the *Deipnosophistae*, a combination gastronomical and philosophical treatise): a princess's provocative dance, a promise of half the kingdom, a deadly wish promised and eventually granted. These features validate the folkloristic aspect of the narrative.[37]

The stories about Esther and Salomé are similar to Herodotus's Xerxes. In Herodotus, that story is a common type scene with the theme of the vengeful queen. This motif is important for understanding the *Histories*.[38] Flory articulates the motif parallel to Mark's Salomé story: "The constituent elements of this motif are the woman's cleverness, the personal or family motive for her revenge, the intricacy of her planning — often over a period of time — and the horrible and usually bloody nature of the revenge itself, which outstrips in ferocity the degree of insult that provoked it."[39] The story of Amestris's revenge from book nine is particularly closely linked with one of the first stories in the work, Gyges and the queen's nakedness.[40] These "companion stories" about Xerxes and Gyges and their queens are "consciously contrasted stories that, together, function as a program for the whole work,"[41] demonstrating the role of chance and the human susceptibility to irrationality. Conventional type scenes in ancient historical works were how those historical texts were viewed as working out history. Keep in mind that Robert Alter originally borrowed the phrase and concept of *type scene* that I have been using from Greek literature, from Homeric scholarship.

Any simplistic explanation that similarity equals dependence must deal with the ubiquity of the theme in many ancient cultures. The reader

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36. Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. A. D. Godley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press—Loeb edition, 1925), 4:285–93.

37. J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Herod's Oath and the Baptist's Head," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 9 (1965): 49 [339]. This article was later republished in J. Duncan M. Derrett, *Law in the New Testament* (Eugene, OR: Sipf and Stock, 2005), 339–62.

38. Stewart Flory, *The Archaic Smile of Herodotus* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 42.

39. Flory, *Archaic*, 42.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., 47.

would soon be engulfed in a twisted tangle of historical precedence, borrowing, and narrative theft that, subtracting the pejorative meanings of *plagiarism*, we would praise as allusion and intertextuality in the antique preference for traditional stories that repeat foundational and recurring heritage events.

The Salomé/Esther Intertext

Any adequate account of the John and Salomé story in Mark must deal with its relationship to Esther. The Bible collects stories in which women use wine and food as seductive tools toward their ultimate goal of decapitating or eliminating men: Judith, Esther, Jael, Delilah, Salomé.[42] These stories warn men of the dangerous mixture of appetites: sex, food, wine, and women. "Expecting platters of pleasure and celebration, the male reader sees his own death as the main course."[43] These stories share a Mediterranean theme portraying women as dangerous.

Judith and Esther are so similar that biblical critics often raise questions about their historicity. These stories are paradigmatic with "models of courage for moral entertainment."[44] Bach gathers the biblical stories in which a woman has a man decapitated or does the deed herself. "Food and drink are two of the temptations that lead to sexual desire and death in each of these stories."[45] Herod Antipas's feast that leads to a beheading is paralleled by Ahasuerus's constant feasting. The story of Esther is invoked by the gospel writers only in Mark's narrative about Herod Antipas, Herodias, and John the Baptizer (that is, Esther isn't alluded to in Matthew's version of the story).[46] By quoting from the book of Esther and shadowing some of its themes, Mark places John in the context of ancient Hebraic history and ritual (think of Purim and celebrating a deliverance from a pogrom, and the Jewish framing of various attempts at genocide since as repetitions of Haman's plan) as not just a Christian forerunner but also a successor to Israel's prophetic tradition.

> Rather than merely appropriating Hebraic traditions for the new Christian sect and abandoning their cultural matrix, the author recalls and restores them in an effort to remain connected to them and to understand the present in terms

42. Bach, *Women*, 4.
43. Ibid., 9.
44. Ibid., 200.
45. Ibid., 213.
46. Schildgen, "Blind," 115–16.

of the past. Rather than attempting to transcend the past, to see the present as a fulfillment of the past, or to replace the past with the present, he invokes the Hebrew past for its moral superiority and not, as is often assumed, because it exemplifies a tradition which the Christian faith subverts. In other words, instead of promoting a rupture with Hebrew tradition, Mark's writing actually pursues a morally informed retrieval of that tradition.[47]

That is what happens when the New Testament or Book of Mormon invokes the Hebrew Bible, or even when parts of the Tanakh invoke other parts of the sacred text: they are updating the tradition and making it relevant for the writers' day, paying homage to the heritage while adapting to contemporary circumstances in the belief that God's way is one eternal round that repeats the events of the past with a difference. Instead of promoting a sharp rupture with Hebraic traditions, Mark scissors and sews together a textuality of continuity. "In selecting specific texts, he was establishing continuity with the past by showing deference to its most revered textual resources,"[48] engaging in what Michael Fishbane notes is a primary textual feature of the Hebrew Bible: inner-biblical exegesis. Mark's use of Ahasuerus's words, which Antipas repeats,[49] "makes his [Mark's] version of John's death a commentary on the Book of Esther; the retrieval also draws attention to the literary parallels between the two stories."[50] Both "kings" promise half the kingdom at

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47. Ibid., 116. Although composed of the same writings, the Old Testament, the Tanakh, and the Hebrew Bible are different names because those texts are fitted into different canons and traditions. The word *Tanakh* is an initialism of the Hebrew words for the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. The phrase *Hebrew Bible* is a scholarly invention to avoid the use of preferential terms for the scripture in the Christian and Jewish traditions. The concept of the *Old Testament* frames the Hebraic writing as an appendage to the New Testament. A passage from the Tanakh can have substantially different meaning than the same excerpt in the Old Testament because of the background assumptions that cohabit with each term.

48. Ibid., 117.

49. "And when the daughter of the said Herodias came in, and danced, and pleased Herod and them that sat with him, the king said unto the damsel, Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee. And he sware unto her, Whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, *unto the half of my kingdom*" (Mark 6:22–23); "Then said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be *even given thee to the half of the kingdom*" (Esther 5:3 — see also 5:6; 7:2).

50. Ibid. Just preceding the story of dancing and beheading among the Jaredites, the phrase used by Moroni to describe a rebellion by Jared against Omer is another

a banquet; the gathering at which "kings" make a blank-check promise isn't for common people (such as Andrew Jackson's seven-ton cheese-block social in the White House),[51] but for courtiers, aristocrats, military officers, and elites.[52]

Repetitions of Grandstanding Kings and the "Blind" Promise

The allusive connections between the stories of a "king" making a blind promise combined with a dance and beheading bind the narratives together to reveal connections we would not see without some explicit sign such as the princely promise. Such a version of textuality assumed not just a relationship between Old and New Testament stories but also a theory of time that challenges our modern linear temporality, which portrays movement only one direction — toward the future. The biblical notion of time repeats important events and covenants by sending the reader back in time to forecast a future with present and past intertwined. "In a historically minded culture like Judaism, time is certainly linear, but it moves back and forth in historical linearity, not only forward into the future."[53] Not only is our perception of Mark changed by recognizing his invocation of Esther, but our understanding of the Esther story is transformed also: we gain understanding and wisdom by traveling the distance and time on the dusty historical and literary roads and byways between Macherus, Shushan, and Heth.

The Esther narrative is itself full of allusions. Berg, in good historical-critical fashion, says these thematic connections indicate that Esther isn't historical.[54] Some say the Mark story of John's death isn't historical because it isn't original. The influence of Esther is obvious because Antipas is portrayed as a king, but his arrangement with Rome as tetrarch was considerably less than kingly. So Antipas's promise of "half my kingdom" couldn't be historical, says Taylor, but likely was derived

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signpost to the allusive connection between this cluster of stories, for "when [Jared] had gained the *half of the kingdom* he gave battle unto his father, and he did carry away his father into captivity" (Ether 8:3, see also verse 2) before Omer is restored to the throne and Jared's life spared to attempt insurrection again and murder.

51.   See the West Wing excerpted version of Josiah Bartlett's big-block-of-cheese day at kireon1, "SGTE,SGTJ Leo's Cheese Speech," YouTube video, 2:42, May 25, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vm9HZq53rqU.

52.   F. Scott Spencer, *Dancing Girls, Loose Ladies, and Women of the Cloth*: *The Women in Jesus' Life* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 53.

53.   Schildgen, "Blind," 118–19.

54.   Sandra Beth Berg, *The Book of Esther: Motifs, Themes, and Structure* (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1979), 123.

from Esther 5:6 and 7:2. Other Jewish stories probably contributed to Herodias's shrewish portrayal.[55] Listed below are relevant passages from the book of Esther:

> Now it came to pass in the days of Ahasuerus, (this is Ahasuerus which reigned, from India even unto Ethiopia, over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces:)

> That in those days, when the king Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace,

> In the third year of his reign, **he made a feast unto all his princes and his servants**; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him: …

> On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king,

> **To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on.**

> But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him. …

> And Memucan answered before the king and the princes, Vashti the queen hath not done wrong to the king only, but also to all the princes, and to all the people that are in all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus.

> For this deed of the queen shall come abroad unto all women, so that they shall despise their husbands in their eyes, when it shall be reported, The king Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she came not.

> Likewise shall the ladies of Persia and Media say this day unto all the king's princes, which have heard of the deed of the queen. Thus shall there arise too much contempt and wrath.

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55. Joan E. Taylor, *The Immerser: John the Baptist within Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 246–47; Derrett too notes the similarities between stories, "Herod's," 55 [343].

> If it please the king, let there go a royal commandment from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, that it be not altered, That Vashti come no more before king Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate unto another that is better than she. (Esther 1:1–3, 10–12, 16–19)

"Little Girls" Dancing before Kings and Other Lecherous Fools

Roger Aus demonstrates the connections between Salomé and Esther, mediated by rabbinic commentaries on Esther.

> Almost all commentators agree that Salome's behavior here is hardly imaginable for a Herodian "princess." Whatever view one may have of this family's morals, no female member of the aristocracy would ever have performed a solo dance before a large group of half-drunk men…. This motif must be sought elsewhere [other than in Jewish writings], in pagan customs.[56]

Greek and Roman sources often used such dancing girls to denote prostitutes or courtesans, but the practice was not Jewish. This is reflected in 2 Targum to Esther 2:8 where the Persian girls hope to succeed Queen Vashti by dancing to demonstrate their comeliness; the targum has Esther refusing to dance.[57] This dancing theme in the Baptist narrative is dependent on the Esther midrashim or earlier iterations of the tradition.[58] This story relies on knowledge of Persian practices; Aus

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56. Roger Aus, *Water into Wine and the Beheading of John the Baptist: Early Jewish-Christian Interpretation of Esther 1 in John 2:1–11 and Mark 6:17–29* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), 50–51.

57. Ibid., 51. As Aus notes (2), the Esther Scroll dates to the fourth century BCE, although that version wasn't completed in its definitive form until the second century. The aggadic elaborations had been included in the Septuagint translation by the second century. Even if the final editing of the targums and midrashim on Esther occurred centuries later, and even though they also show much definitively later development of earlier haggadic traditions, nevertheless they *also* contain materials which go back to the earlier Tannaim (25–25), but even that content can't be dated with more precision. The Second Targum is an Aramaic midrash on the Esther story that collected rabbinic elaborations on Esther's biblical account variously dated from the fourth to the tenth century in the form now available.

58. Dating specific aggadic stories was possible only once the oral traditions were committed to writing in the Middle Ages, but "it is clear that a very considerable part of the material preserved in the Talmudic-Midrashic sources is much older than it appears at first sight to be." If one asserts a directional influence

refers to Herodotus 5.18 where feast guests say to their host, "It is our Persian custom after the giving of any great banquet to bring in also the concubines and wedded wives to sit by the men."[59] So also one Esther midrash says the following about Persian and Mede dancing:

> Rabbi Jose said: It was the universal custom of the kings of Media when they were eating and drinking to cause their women to come before them stark naked, playing and dancing, in order to see the beauty of their figures. When the wine entered the heart of Ahasuerus, he wished to act in this manner with Vashti the queen. She was the daughter of a king, and was not willing to do this. He decreed concerning her, and she was slain.[60]

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between the rabbinic Esther elaborations of the scriptural story and the New Testament stories of the Baptist and Herod Antipas, then that direction is from Esther midrashim to the gospels. "Much of the finest aggadah, including much that bears the names of later teachers, originated during the period of the Second Commonwealth. Some of the most creative spirits among the Pharisees remain forever nameless." Bernard J. Bamberger, "The Dating of Aggadic Materials," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 68, no. 2 (June 1949): 123. The Second Commonwealth period, also called the Second Temple period, dates from the return of the Jews from Mesopotamian exile sponsored by the Persian empire with the impetus to rebuild the Solomonic temple (which return started in 538 BCE) to the Roman destruction of the temple (70 CE). Although many of these traditional stories were first written after the New Testament writings, the rabbinic accounts were handed down orally for generations. "We find, then, that many statements ascribed to rabbis who lived from the second to the fourth centuries [CE] are actually much older." Ibid., 120.

59. Aus, *Water*, 52.

60. Ibid. The Gemara (consolidated from oral tradition into written form between AD 200 and 500) in rabbinic tradition has Ahasuerus initiating a contest over whether Median or Persian women were more beautiful. His courtiers follow the king's cues that neither is most beautiful but Chaldean women are (Vashti was Chaldean). The drunken men ask to see her, as long as the Queen comes before them naked. She, daughter of a king, views such a demand as reprehensible. The Babylonian rabbinic materials later consolidated into the Babylonian Talmud are decidedly more negative about Vashti's character than were the materials gathered into the Jerusalem Talmud. Dating oral tradition is difficult and imprecise, but these oral expansions of scripture emerged after the return from Babylonian/Persian exile in 538 BC among the precursors of the Pharisees in the Tannaitic Period, which was triggered by the destruction of the Jerusalem temple (AD 70). The Pharisees, upon the loss of the temple and its institutions, were succeeded by the schools of traditionists who converted from memory-only based transmission of tradition to literary-plus-memory generational transfer. The *tannaim* were the rabbis who collected these midrashim and legal interpretations from earlier

Another midrashic explanation notes that Vashti was beheaded.[61] After displacing Vashti, Ahasuerus holds a contest inviting the virgins into his bed. Esther wins the competition and becomes the new queen. Vashti's midrashic refusal to dance bridges the New and Old Testament canonical stories.

The Salomé story and the Esther narratives establish a relationship between Ahasuerus and Herod Antipas: "A parodic reading would connect the two kings, one a pagan Babylonian and one a Jewish puppet of the Roman regime, through their lavish celebrations. Vashti, a pagan queen, refuses to perform in spite of her husband's command; the daughter of Herodias, an adulterous improper Jewish queen, dances even before being offered the prize."[62] The gospels portray Herod Antipas, although only a tetrarch (which could be translated as "the governor of one fourth" of a province), as a king to link with the Esther story. "Assuming Mark's typological casting of Herod as a king, scholars aver that Mark portrays Herod in the visage of a Septuagint 'king' type like Ahab or Ahasuerus."[63]

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material into what became the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud: the Mishnah, the Tosefta, and halakhic interpretations. Originally these traditions were oral and emerged from the various rabbinic schools where they were memorized word-for-word for diffusion to the larger school in the Common Era.

61. Ibid. The *Midrash Panim Aherim*, version B, para. 1 account has Vashti decapitated for refusing the king's demand. This midrash, in the oldest extant manuscript, was written in the Middle Ages, the 12th or 13th century, but circulated orally for centuries before being committed to writing. Dating oral traditions before they were written is difficult and imprecise. Two main positions have emerged about the possibility of dating these rabbinic midrashim: both hold that "rabbinic oral tradition extends far back into the Second Temple period." Martin S. Jaffee, "How Much 'Orality' in Oral Torah? New Perspectives on the Composition and Transmission of Early Rabbinic Tradition," *Shofar* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 53–54. The longer-standing scholarly position asserts that such rabbinic tradition can be provided a reliable provenance to that Second Commonwealth period and "represents a coherent, self-consciously preserved body of knowledge which can be reconstructed to a significant degree from extant rabbinic texts." Jaffee, "How," 54. The other strain of thought "argues that while early rabbinic society must certainly have had oral traditions, it is no longer possible to reconstruct these on the basis of surviving literature." The older, more established, view "has remained nearly unchallenged within even historical informed Jewish theological circles." Jaffee, "How," 62.

62. Bach, *Women*, 233.

63. Abraham Smith, "Tyranny Exposed: Mark's Typological Characterization of Herod Antipas (Mark 6:14–29)," *Biblical Interpretation* 14, no. 3 (2006): 267.

Food, Sex, Seduction, and Manslaughter

Esther becomes queen without revealing her Hebrew identity. Haman, jealous of Esther's uncle Mordecai and furious that Mordecai refuses to bend the knee to him, plots a Jewish pogrom, and Esther foils his plan by throwing a feast, inviting Ahasuerus and Haman: "The site Esther chooses for her seduction is not the bedroom but the banquet hall. It is food, wine, and spectacle that Esther uses rather than her body to get the king to order Haman's death."[64] After Esther petitions to save the Jews and reveals herself to be one (and therefore under threat from Haman's proposed pogrom), an agitated Ahasuerus leaves; when he reenters the room, he believes the pleading and clutching Haman is raping Esther. Haman loses his life. Esther's petition to spare the Jews is granted, Haman is hanged instead of Mordecai, and Purim becomes a Jewish celebration in perpetuity.

Speaking of Herod Antipas's promise, Bach notes the similarity to the book of Esther and the elements of promise, food, desire, and death:

> A ruler's similarly foolish promise is found in the book of Esther, where besotted king Ahasuerus, at a banquet, promises the young Queen Esther, also termed *korasion* in the LXX, the apple of his eye, that she may have anything she desires up to half his kingdom. Both stories involve women manipulating men through wining, dining, and gazing at delicious feminine beauty. Each of the all-powerful kings ends up ordering a man killed although he may not truly want to execute the man. Each ruler violates legal authority with impunity because each has had his mind "poisoned" by desiring a very tasty female dish.[65]

Like Antipas, Ahasuerus makes the princely offer: "As kings besotted by female beauty are wont to do, Ahasuerus offers Esther half his kingdom. Like Salomé, who receives the same offer, there is a literary gasp at this point, in which the reader understands at the same time as the female character that she has won, she will get her wish."[66]

The king plays the important role of one conditioned by license and pleasure to fulfill his own desires: "The monarch in the book of Esther, however, is a buffoon, the typological motif of the stupid king, a dangerous, hedonistic fool, capable of being led astray by evil men and

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64. Bach, *Women*, 191.
65. Ibid., 231.
66. Ibid., 198.

not reliably able to choose between good and bad advice."[67] Ahasuerus is the "caricature of a typical Oriental potentate," of which Radday lists a number: Cyrus the Great, Darius II, Artaxerxes II, Ptolemy II, Alexander Balas, John Hurcan, and Herod. "Jews have indeed had much experience of similar unpredictable rulers, from antiquity to modern times."[68] Such erratic and foolish rulers aren't relegated to the ancient Near East; in contemporary times we no longer have multi-potent kings in political systems with separation of powers, but Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (to cite just a few examples) have endured recent similar impulsive, capricious, and vain rulers. Such cyclical historical experiences aren't confined to antiquity or faraway realms but are universal archetypes and historical figures because they emerge in every age and political system.

Connecting Narratives Using Key Words

The parallels between Ahasuerus and Herod Antipas are striking. Mark 6:20 shows "King" Herod Antipas perplexed at John's message. Antipas is baffled because Jewish tradition has King Ahasuerus being puzzled, a word-play on the eunuch's name: Mehuman.[69] Only after Ahasuerus's confusion does the king have Vashti decapitated (in the midrashic, not the biblical, accounts) and likewise after his "puzzlement"[70] does "king" Herod Antipas have the Baptist decollated.[71]

Salomé is a "little girl" in the Mark account because that is what an Esther midrash requires. Aus says Mark portrays her as around twelve at the time.[72] Mark uses the Greek *korasion*, "little girl" (6:22 and 6:28) to refer to Salomé and other young female characters in the stories surrounding the Salomé narrative.[73] Aus notes Salomé's dependence on Herodias, taking it as a sign of the daughter's immaturity. "Such

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67. Susan Niditch, *Underdogs and Tricksters: A Prelude to Biblical Folklore* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 151.

68. Yehuda T. Radday, "Esther with Humour," *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Yehuda T. Radday and Athalya Brenner (Sheffield, UK: Almond, 1990), 295–96; see also Bach, *Women,* 187.

69. Aus, *Water,* 43.

70. Some translations follow the KJV by stating that Herod "did many things" (Mark 6:20) with the Baptist, while other translations render the phrase instead along lines that Antipas "was greatly puzzled" by John.

71. Aus, *Water,* 44.

72. Ibid., 49.

73. Kara J. Lyons-Pardue, "'Little Daughters' and Big Scriptural Allusions: Reading Three of Mark's Stories Featuring Women with Care," in *Listening Again to*

behavior to the modern mind would at the most warrant the term *kore*, 'girl,' but not *korasion*, 'little girl.'"[74] This rare term is used in Greek Esther versions. As Ahasuerus hunts for a new wife, the *korasia* hope to be selected, and dancing before the king might be part of the young girls' dress rehearsal. "The term 'little girl' in the Baptist narrative, though strange to the modern mind, is thus appropriate to its context."[75]

In the Masoretic Hebrew text, the Esther narrative doesn't say how Vashti died (or even if). The Septuagint Greek-language story is expanded to include her execution (perhaps the Masoretic and Septuagintal texts are working from different manuscript traditions). Other rabbinic sources fill the gap with the beheading, including one in which the king's eunuch says, "My lord the king, say but a word and I will bring in her head on a platter."[76]

Other parallels emerge. Aus notes the similarities between Mark's story and Herodotus's story of Xerxes (9.108–113) (although not definitive, the king the Bible calls "Ahasuerus" and the king Herodotus calls "Xerxes" appear to be the same person). Aus posits the Esther writer borrowed material so that the elements "filled in" by Jewish tradition corresponded to Herodotus. Therefore, the Herodotus, Esther, and Mark stories of banquets and beheadings are complexly interrelated to each other, but all preceded by Herodotus.[77]

> There was no birthday banquet of a "King" Herod Antipas, no dancing of a "little girl" Salome before drunken men, no head dripping of blood brought in on a platter. Instead, the narrative from Judaic haggada on King Ahasuerus' birthday banquet, at which his innocent queen, Vashti, lost her head, provides the background for the questions of why and how Herod Antipas beheaded John. It does so in a typically Palestinian-Judaic way. It fills in what is not explicitly stated in the text. The question of historicity should not be asked here. The narrative "truth" in the setting of the gospel lies on a different level: John's death prefigures Jesus', and the Baptist's tomb, however, Jesus' activity continues or begins on

the Text: New Testament Studies in Honor of George Lyons, ed. Richard P. Thompson (Claremont, CA: Claremont, 2020), 46.

74. Aus, *Water*, 49.

75. Ibid., 50.

76. Ibid., 63.

77. Ibid., 71.

a new level for those who confess him as the Son of God, the Lord of their lives.[78]

Aus notes ten broad similarities between the Esther midrashim and John's death in Mark 6:17–29. "Cumulatively, however, they simply provide too many exact word and motif similarities for the latter to be dismissed as mere 'reminiscences' of the former."[79] In other words, what too often to the modern mind appears to be clumsy narrative piracy should instead be read as sophisticated intertextuality.

If the Book of Mormon plagiarizes from the Baptist story, then the Baptist story does the same from Esther rabbinic commentaries (or from the predecessors to those commentaries, in written or oral form). The following results if you let this simplistic reading theory go unchallenged: "It is difficult to decide if the account of John's death in the Gospels is the original source for Salome's story or if the biblical version is already a remake of a much older legend — that of a god like Adonis or Attis sacrificed to a Great Goddess, the incarnation of mother earth. There are many suggestions that the latter hypothesis is correct."[80] The generalizable result of getting the Ether story's texture wrong is that vast swaths of the New Testament and Hebrew Bible are also nonhistorical and fictional.

The Antiquity of the Salomé Motif Refracted through Parallelomania and Parallelism

The connections between European folklore and the Salomé story are taken by Kuryluk to be extremely complex: "The antiquity, depth, complexity, and diverse aspects of the Herodias, Salome, and John stories were only gradually discovered in the course of the nineteenth century by scholars of folklore, religion, and anthropology. Their studies disclose the pre-Christian roots of the biblical story."[81] These folkloric motifs have a deeper and more complex genealogy than simplistic notions about plagiarism permit.

Brodie and Ham don't care that their textual theory also jeopardizes belief in the Bible's historicity. Similarly, acting the village atheist on the Internet, Steven Carr makes the following point, citing the very passage from which Brodie began:

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78. Ibid., 73–74.

79. Ibid., 67.

80. Ewa Kuryluk, *Salome and Judas in the Cave of Sex: The Grotesque: Origins, Iconography, Techniques* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1987), 192.

81. Kuryluk, *Salome*, 201.

> Christians routinely dismiss many stories in the Book of Mormon and the Qur'an as being obviously stolen from previous stories. They are right to do so, but this article discusses whether the same rules apply to the miracles of Jesus. Were these stories also stolen from previous stories? I set out to show that Christians must concede that the evidence that the miracle stories of Jesus were taken from the Old Testament is just as convincing as the evidence that stories in the Book of Mormon and the Qur'an were simply lifted from the Old Testament.[82]

The evidence is "just as" convincing for the Bible and Book of Mormon, but in each case, it amounts to little. Carr follows by claiming, "What could be more obvious and clear-cut?" But this interpretation is neither obvious nor clear-cut. Carr asserts again: "Just as Joseph Smith did in the Book of Mormon, the early Christians drew upon the one source that they held to be infallible — the Old Testament. They felt quite justified in taking stories from the Old Testament and applying them to Jesus." The Jewish tradition (from which Christianity didn't finalize a separation until after the gospels and Pauline epistles were written) has never treated the biblical text as infallible in the way moderns think of infallibility, so Carr vastly misunderstands the textual theory applicable in this argument.[83] Brodie's claims aren't superior to Carr's. It is entirely reasonable to apply the principle consistently to the two scriptures. The principle itself is problematic and uncritical, a problem never confronted by readers of both scriptural texts who don't think through the possibility that ancient writers and readers thought very differently about how stories might be true or historical than we moderns do (ancient readers aren't fixated on the historical questions moderns are). If a reader gets the foundational textual questions crooked and askew (let alone answers to those question), then the floors, ceilings, walls, joists, and roof will be impossible to true up, level, and plumb throughout the rest of the house.

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82. Steven Carr, "Miracles and the Book of Mormon," Jan. 27, 2001, https://web.archive.org/web/20190316063038/http://www.bowness.demon.co.uk/mirc1.htm.

83. Carr imposes Catholic and modern concepts on ancient texts, thereby thoroughly misunderstanding them. See Joshua Berman, *Ani Maamin: Biblical Criticism, Historical Truth, and the Thirteen Principles of Faith* (New Milford, CT: Maggid, 2020). See also Joshua A. Berman, *Inconsistency in the Torah: Ancient Literary Conventions and the Limits of Source Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

From an evangelical apologetic perspective, Glenn Miller responds to Carr with the necessary point that "what *seems* 'obvious and clear-cut' *still needs to be* demonstrated with evidence and argument."[84] Engaging in what biblical scholars often deride as "parallelomania," "that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarities in passages then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction"[85] is simplistic. That stories are similar isn't enough to conclude that one story borrows from another. Some channel of transmission must be demonstrated, but more importantly the narratives must have a complex of common elements: "As a safeguard, this demand for complexity or pattern seems so reasonable that few would want to challenge it."[86] We need better informed and more catholic critics of the Book of Mormon.

Tigay cites a couple of literary critics on this matter. Let me refer to a fuller quotation from Wellek and Warren than the Tigay source cites:

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84.   Glen Miller, "Good Question … did the gospel authors simply rip-off stories from the OT and ascribe them to Jesus?," Christian Think Tank, May 3, 1999, https://www.christian-thinktank.com/qotripoff.html. This material from Fawn Brodie shows up many times in anti-Mormon books and web pages. For example, like Ham's plagiary, one website plagiarizes Brodie without attribution (and irony): the "daughter of Jared danced before the king (Ether 8) like the daughter of Herodias (Matthew 14) (decapitation followed in both cases)." See "Questions related to the Book of Mormon and other items on Mormonism and Joseph Smith," About The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (website), https://www.lds-mormon.com/bookofmormonquestions.shtml/#BOM8. The other parts of Brodie's paragraph also show up in this vicinity under the heading "Why do so many stories seem like exaggerated borrowings from the Bible?" Failure of originality often accompanies failure to acknowledge borrowings (while the critics at the same time are accusing the Book of Mormon of plagiarism and a destitution of novelty). I am not sure who originally stole Fawn Brodie's paragraph to reproduce without bibliographic information on the Internet. You can also find the same material at "Difficult Questions for Mormons," The Interactive Bible, http://www.bible.ca/mor-questions.htm. There is some paradox in Brodie's charges of plagiarism being so often plagiarized on the Internet.

85.   The words are S. Sandmel's from "Parallelomania," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962): 1–13. I am quoting them from Jeffrey H. Tigay, "On Evaluating Claims of Literary Borrowing," *The Tablet and the Scroll: Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William W. Hallo*, ed. Mark E. Cohen, Daniel C. Snell, and David B. Weisberg (Bethesda, MD: CDL, 1993), 250, https://web.archive.org/web/20080314201818/http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/jwst/borrow.htm.

86.   Tigay, "On Evaluating," 251.

> Parallels must be real parallels, not vague similarities assumed to turn, by mere multiplication, into proof. Forty noughts still make nought. Furthermore, parallels must be exclusive parallels; that is, there must be reasonable certainty that they cannot be explained by a common source, a certainty attainable only if the investigator has a wide knowledge of literature or if the parallel is a highly intricate pattern rather than an isolated "motif" or word.[87]

Abuses of parallels are rampant and common among modern readers. The discovery of thematic parallels is merely the first step beyond which artless readers rarely go.

> But most questions of literary relationships are, obviously, far more complex and require for their solution critical analysis, for which the bringing together of parallels is merely a minor instrument. The defects of many studies of this kind lie precisely in their ignoring this truth: in their attempts to isolate one single trait, they break the work of art into little pieces of mosaic. The relationships between two or more works of literature can be discussed profitably only when we see them in their proper place within the scheme of literary development. Relationships between works of art present a critical problem of comparing two wholes, two configurations not to be broken into isolated components except for preliminary study.[88]

The Book of Mormon is, in other words, too complex for such inadequate explanations asserting plagiarism upon a surface reading of the text because such assertions fragment both the predecessor and successor texts without attempting to reassemble the wholes individually or in combination.

In this effort to pry apart the two types of Book of Mormon critics, let me cite first Fawn Brodie again and then, in a parallel column, an evangelical Christian under her heading of "Borrowings from the Bible":

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87. Rene Wellek and Austin Warren. *Theory of Literature*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1956), 258.

88. Ibid.

Fawn Brodie	Ruth Tucker
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.[89]	Many of the stories in the *Book of Mormon* were, as Fawn Brodie and many others have shown, 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.[90]

Tucker includes no quotation marks, yet she is obviously citing Brodie nearly word for word. I doubt any deception is intended here; the plagiarist does, after all, cite her source while taking credit for Brodie's wording. Yet so many critics who accuse Joseph Smith of plagiarizing from the Bible end up plagiarizing from the Brodie bible, without even understanding the modern notion of plagiarism — let alone the relevant rhetorical concepts such as allusion and metalepsis.

Dancing Women and Lost Heads

Book of Mormon narrative deserves better readings. These readers I have surveyed fail Wellek and Warren's test that those asserting literary dependence must be widely read. The second criterion is that the two texts share a complex literary pattern rather than isolated features.

As a point of accuracy, note that Brodie fails to summarize correctly. First, the character doesn't "dance before a king," as Brodie claims; she dances before Akish,[91] an ally of the king and later conspirator against him. Second, at the time of the conspiratorial dance, Jared plans to decollate his father (Omer, the king) but doesn't succeed. Brodie's brief summary implies that the daughter of Jared danced before a King Akish and a beheading of King Omer followed as a result, as quickly as in the

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89.   Brodie, *No Man*, 62–63.

90.   Ruth A. Tucker, *Another Gospel: Cults, Alternative Religions and the New Age Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 55.

91.   At the time of the dance, Akish is at most only an aspiring king: at the time of the dance (Ether 8:11), Akish is designated "the son of Kimnor," and only after intervening events such as Akish's organization of a secret criminal society and Omer's dream telling him to flee the land does Jared grant Akish his daughter as wife and Akish is mentioned in regard to kingship (Ether 9:6).

Mark story, where the implication of the story's timeframe is that Salomé's dance, the blind promise, the consultation and request, the execution of John, and his banquet-ready presentation on a platter happen in quick succession, perhaps while the drunken feast still progresses (Ahasuerus's banquet lasts 180 days, after all [Esther 1:4]). Such a summary, though, smooths over details and elides the difference between Mark's story of John and Salomé and the account in Ether of Jared, Akish, and Jared's daughter through ambiguous paraphrase.

Akish later decapitates Jared (his co-conspirator), so the dancing and the beheading are removed from each other. The story provides no timeline, but years may have passed between the dancing and Jared's death. So many narrated events intervene between the dancing and Jared's beheading that the connection must be defended, not just asserted. The dancing occurs in Ether 8:11, and the decollation happens in Ether 9:5, 20 verses later. Intervening events include Akish's administration of a secret oath to an incipient Gadianton-style criminal gang, Moroni's digression on the similarity between Nephite and Jaredite secret societies, Omer's departure into the wilderness, Jared's anointing as king, the marriage of Jared's daughter to Akish, and Akish's secret combination to behead Jared. Of course, narrative time doesn't have to correspond to chronological time. Jared became king, but because "the Lord warned Omer in a dream that he should depart out of the land; wherefore Omer departed out of the land with his family" (Ether 9:3) and his head; the originally intended decapitation target escapes safely and one of the decollation conspirators is the one beheaded. The decollation story in the Book of Mormon isn't rotely repetitive from the narrative of the Baptist's death. Although a common occurrence in antiquity, the Ether decapitation account is both recurrent and original — adapted to its own context while recounting a story ever new yet so familiar in human societies.

Girardian Stories of Ambition, Greed, Murder, and Human Nature

This story line is repeated throughout literary history and is sometimes called a "Girardian story," named after René Girard, a portion of whose work analyzed such narratives.[92] A Girardian story, like the Herod-

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92. Girard was a French literary critic/philosopher/religious commentator (although he spent his entire academic career in the U.S.) whose analysis of myth, the Bible, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, and many other generative texts of Western culture advocates pacificism in the face of the violence endemic to human culture.

family narrative, overflows with greed, ambition, and desire, as do a vast collection of narratives from antiquity, political journalism, historical accounts, TV shows and movies (an Internet search finds just a few named examples: *Game of Thrones*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, *JFK*, *House of Cards*, *I … for Icarus*, *The Day of the Jackal*, *Wolf Hall* — the last of which even comes with beheadings), and soap operas, operas, and phantoms of the opera more generally narrating the evil and rotten state of the dramatic stages in the U.S., France, Britain, and Denmarks fictional and historical — and is therefore ripe for a Girardian reading. Girard's one great and consistent theme is based on his view of universal human nature: humans are imitative creatures driven by desire to overcome a mimetic opponent and possess what the slavish double has and covets. These mimetic cycles spiral out of control, resulting in a scapegoating mechanism where individuals and groups single out an innocent victim (individual or group) at which to direct their violent passions. After a spasm of violence resulting in the death and deification of the scapegoat, the tension in that society that winds up the violent spring inside a group or individual is released until the scapegoating mechanism starts a new cycle by cranking that coil mechanism tighter again with each click. For Girard, the example of Jesus who resisted spiraling violent cycles with opponents (and building up to the Christian revelation [and the message of the Old Testament prophets advocating against and revealing such scapegoating that prefigures the message of Jesus]) by denying the guilt of the scapegoats is the only way out of such human tendencies toward violent and intensifying rivalry.

Desire to possess what a mimetic twin has or wants is the triggering device of communal violence that initiates wars, riots, lynchings, corporate takeovers, political campaigns, adultery, and much more.[93]

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93. Mimetic twins are people (or groups) who compete with each other for an object of desire (a mate, money, status, objects of great or little value). Following Augustine, Girard draws upon foundational stories such as Cain and Abel and Romulus and Remus. Cain and Abel compete for divine favor by offering sacrificed animals or harvested crops. Cain kills his brother because the former's offering is rejected by God; God curses Cain to be a wanderer, but he instead immediately following founds the first city. Romulus kills his brother as they start building the wall for the city of Rome and becomes the founder of a great civilization. Augustine argues that all civilizations are built upon such founding violence. As the mimetic twins compete for the prize, they become more and more like each other, willing to ratchet up the means of obtaining what is desired until friendly competition turns into violent confrontation. Just watch two men in sports cars pull up to a street light; they will race off the line so as not to let the other win an award of no value.

Such agonistic events constitute one of the great themes of scripture, literature, film, drama, history, biography, and legend. Outside John the Baptist, the rest of the characters in Mark's story are such imitative copies of each other. "With the exception of the prophet, there are only mimetic doubles and look-alikes in our text: Herod and his brother, Herod and Herodias, and finally the guests. *Herod* and *Herodias* phonetically suggest sameness, and the two names are constantly reiterated in our text,"[94] with the wife Herodias goading the husband Herod, who has delayed action to defend her honor until she manipulates her daughter into eliciting the blind princely promise and inspires the little girl to demand a decapitation.

Similarly, the daughter of Jared — the instigator and inflamer of desire in others in the Ether story — is never named. She, whose desire fuels the covetousness in Jared and Akish as they each vie for a throne, pits doppelganger husband and father against each other in a deadly trajectory toward dismemberment. Akish even recruits his extended family in a violent conspiracy to obtain political power, the group and individual acting as a Girardian mob intent on brutal and sadistic decollation of the king's body and the body politic. The daughter's proposal to her father in the contest for power is itself imitative, borrowed from the record that recounts those "of old, that they by their secret plans did obtain kingdoms and great glory" (Ether 8:9). Mark's Salomé has no innate desires, for she is just a child, but must be filled with desire by her mother. "Contrary to what Freud believes, to what we all believe, there is no preordained object of desire. Children in particular have to be told what to desire. Unlike the sultry temptress of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Salome of the gospel is really a child. The Greek word for her is not *kore* [girl] but *korasion*, which means 'a little girl.'"[95]

The story of Jaredite son rebelling against father to obtain the throne in a long chain of Freudian generational conflicts has Jared's conspiracy to obtain Omer's head framed as just one link in the book of Ether, maintaining the streak of sons taking up arms against their father-kings or brother-kings starting in Ether 7:4 and continuing to the end of the Jaredite polity: Corihor→Kib, Shule→Corihor, Noah→Shule, and the sons of Shule→Noah, Cohor→Shule (to list just the regal lineage in Ether 7). Jared and Akish are merely imitating the doings of their immediate ancestors and not merely reaching back to the deeds of Mesopotamian

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94. René Girard, "Scandal and the Dance: Salome in the Gospel of Mark," *New Literary History* 15, no. 2 (Winter 1984): 315.

95. Ibid., 313.

legends "concerning them of old, that they by their secret plans did obtain kingdoms and great glory" (Ether 8:9). Not only does Moroni project the future based on this pattern of human conduct by typologizing the extinction of the Nephites based on these conspiratorial power grabs and warning latter-day Gentiles of the same archetypes and antitypes, but he notes that these cycles of violence, sedition, and captivity were specifically predicted at the foundation of Jaredite political society when the people demand their first king: "which brought to pass the saying of the brother of Jared that they would be brought into captivity" (Ether 7:5 where Moroni refers to Ether 6:23 upon the inception of the Jaredite dynasty).

Herodias's desire for revenge against John is transferred to and heightened in transmission to the little girl, for she is the one who first demands that the Baptist's head be served on a platter, much as other delectable food has been served at the "king's" banquet. "Her mother's desire has become her own. The fact that Salome's desire is entirely imitative detracts not a whit from its intensity; on the contrary, the imitation is fiercer than the original."[96] As with Herodias and Salomé, the daughter of Jared must gift wrap her desire to transfer it to her father by recalling all the great deeds of old. Then she must inspire her father to invite Akish over for entertainment as an appetizer to a projected feast of violence. She even uses Girard's keyword: "let my father send for Akish, the son of Kimnor; and behold, I am fair, and I will dance before him, and I will please him, that *he will desire me* to wife; wherefore if *he shall desire* of thee that ye shall give unto him me to wife, then shall ye say: I will give her if ye will bring unto me the head of my father, the king" (Ether 8:10). Having lit Akish's craving, the conflagration will move beyond fire breaks and containment lines as it becomes intense enough to move Akish to decollate his father-in-law Jared rather than Omer (Jared's own father), who is the original target. Inspired by his daughter's infectious desire, Jared will eventually lose his own head to the cascading cycles of violence. These Jaredite royal families prefer to keep their murder and mayhem within the family — such are Herodian and Jaredite family values.

"And a Little Child Shall Lead Them" (Isaiah 11:6)

Jared has lost his throne and is inconsolable without that desirable object (Ether 8:7). His daughter sees that sorrow and devises a way to fuel the

96. Ibid., 314.

fire of covetousness in others. Herodias is likewise not above using her own "little girl" to ignite passions and fires of desire to obtain her ends. "To say that the dance pleases not only Herod but all his guests is to say that, by the end of the dance, all are possessed by the desire of Salomé,"[97] much as that dance in front of Akish corrupts and infects all of Jaredite society. As with the daughter of Jared — her longing for power is transferable to both Jared and Akish, to father and husband and beyond — the daughter's decollation proposal boomerangs back on Jared while Omer, the original target, escapes. Keep in mind that the original king proposed for beheading, Omer, is also intricately bound to this family of scoundrels, for "Omer was a friend to Akish" (Ether 8:11). What is a little decapitation among friends and family? For the daughter advocates the decapitation of her own grandfather, and Jared executes the conspiracy to behead his own father.

Akish completes the decollation of his own father-in-law and plans the murder and beheading of this own "friend," a game of thrones that should shock and horrify the modern reader,[98] but such storylines are quite ordinary in ancient Mesopotamia and spin-off cultures among the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians. Such sedition plots were quite common in the Kingdom of Israel and occurred even in the more politically stable Kingdom of Judah after David succeeds Saul (keeping Saul's sons and grandsons under tight surveillance during his reign and ordering his son Solomon to polish off the descendants of Saul — who are the House of David's continuing rivals after David dies) and just a generation later laments the death of his own rebellious son Absalom after the latter's insurrection. While all this scheming is going on, God warns Omer in a dream (Ether 9:3) so he can escape, head and all.

Salomé's newly imported desire for the death of John shows her to be too young and too innocent to conceive her mother's revenge request metaphorically, so when Herodias asks for the Baptist's head, the daughter interprets the request nonfiguratively. "Even in countries where beheading is practiced, to demand someone's head must be interpreted rhetorically, and Salome takes her mother literally. She does not do so intentionally — she has not yet learned to distinguish words from things. She does not recognize the metonymy."[99] And keep in mind

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97. Ibid., 319.

98. So rare is it in Western societies that we have to watch highly rated TV series to see such designs carried out.

99. Ibid., 318.

that "decapitation was a common practice in the ancient world,"[100] as Rita Dolce demonstrates in her survey of Mesopotamia and Syria (and surrounding cultures) from the third millennia BC to the seventh century BC in stele, royal inscriptions, and similar artwork.[101] Note that when the Book of Mormon begins with a beheading — Nephi decapitating Laban — the actors are placed temporally in antiquity but are also literally located in the Ancient Near East; Old World habits die hard and kill harder. Herodias asks of her daughter John's head, meaning his life: "The transferrable meaning of the mother's words is not understood, and the mimetic desire is fulfilled in all its directness."[102] The direction of communicable desire is opposite in the Jaredite story. The daughter of Jared fills the father's head with possibilities based on his autochthonous desire (Ether 8:8), and no person in this family seems to blanch at the gruesome trail of events resulting from a simple erotic dance. She then frolics before Akish to cram his with head with sexual desire mated with murderous aspiration (Ether 8:10–11), which contagion infects his kinsfolk followed by Jaredite society as a whole.

Ham, in his desire to assimilate the Jaredite narrative to the Baptist story, makes the same misstatement about the relationship between the Salomé and Jared stories that Brodie asserts. The king, Omer, is the dancer's grandfather. Her father, Jared, was formerly king and wants to become the once and future king. Jared's daughter offers to dance before Akish to get him to decapitate Omer (neither conspirator is king when the dance occurs — Omer is). Jared later becomes king, as does Akish, when, as the text laconically notes, "Jared was murdered upon his throne, and Akish reigned in his stead" (Ether 9:6; Ether 9:5 notes that Akish "obtained the head of his father-in-law as he sat upon his throne"), with the probability that Akish learned his lesson about acquiring a kingdom through the pattern established by Jared's original proposal (Jared's daughter is Akish's wife at this stage in the narrative). Understandably, for ideological purposes, Ham and Brodie assimilate the Book of Mormon text to the New Testament narrative, where Salomé does indeed "dance for a [putative] king and a beheading follows" causally, but such inattention to the details of the narratives being conflated ought to be noted. The Jaredite story mentions no banquet, no king's birthday,

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100. Joel M. LeMon, "Beheading in the Ancient World," *Bible Odyssey*, https://www.bibleodyssey.org/passages/related-articles/beheading-in-the-ancient-world/.

101. Rita Dolce, *"Losing One's Head" in the Ancient Near East": Interpretation and Meaning of Decapitation* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

102. Baert, "Dancing," 14.

and no blind promise; of course, the reader wouldn't expect every detail of a folklore or historical theme to be repeated in every iteration of the story. Each instance must not only evoke the motif but also vary the literary inheritance to local historical and cultural circumstances. Some typical components drop out and some new elements are added in each version.

Intertextuality and Allusion as Opposed to Parallelomania

The Ether story is substantially different from the Salomé story; of course, our readings are shaped by living in the 21st century, after the historical fascination with the Salomé theme in Renaissance art, late Victorian literary rebellions (such as the Aesthetic Movement exemplified by Oscar Wilde), art (think of Klimt), and theater (Strauss). The biblical and Book of Mormon narratives share two common main elements: dancing and the beheading. If such narrow filiations can establish dependence, then the range of stories I have discussed from the Bible and Greek/Roman history would similarly have to be derived from one *Ur*-source. Concepts such as influence, allusion, intertextuality, and metalepsis are much more sophisticated ways of thinking through the relationships than are theft and plagiarism, the latter derived from notions of property and crime. Since no complex pattern seems apparent in the Brodie-school readings, any plagiarism attribution is dubious and must be defended rigorously.

Of course, the reader should be explicit about either accepting or rejecting Book of Mormon narrative for what it claims to be and its internal timeline to make sense of assertions about dependence. The separation of the Jaredite record at the Tower of Babel and its allusions to older accounts mentioned by the dancer and brought out from Mesopotamia that Moroni summarizes and cites in the Nephite account means the Jared/Akish story can be seen as chronologically prior to biblical themes of Abrahamic covenants, Mosaic liberation, Judahite and Israelite monarchy, Assyrian and Babylonian conquests followed by Persian subjugation, and return to the promised land — let alone Hellenistic conquest and Roman rule through local henchmen such as "King" Herod (Antipas) (Mark 6:14). Mark's linking of John's beheading to the Esther story presumes the chronological priority of Esther. The Jared story and his beheading (if one takes Book of Mormon narrative seriously) has the Jared narrative as chronologically prior to the Baptist story — and the daughter of Jared's citation of accounts even ancient in her day "concerning them of old" "across the great deep" who usurped power, glory, and wealth through conspiratorial violence (Ether 8:9).

The Jaredite record might properly be called antique but not Hebraic, for it emerges from a cultural divergence prior to distinctions such as Hebraic, Israelite, Judaic, or Lehite. But Moroni, in updating and Christianizing the account for his readers (perhaps as the lone Nephite survivor, just a readership of one) and latter-day audiences, can be called Hebraic with all the temporal and historical theories that such a recognition requires. As Schildgen notes of Mark's use of Hebraic scripture in the story of John and Antipas, "Beneath an apparently simple surface lies a rich juxtaposition of present and past that is saturated with Judaic textual tradition and used to mirror the moral, social, and political context in which Mark placed Jesus. His primary sources were the sacred texts of Judaism, but he also employed Greco-Roman phrases, often pointing ironically to the meaning of these diverse references in their new setting" with allusions to the Pentateuch, the historical works, and prophetic records we now recognize in the Hebrew Bible.[103] While the reader of the Salomé and daughter of Jared stories isn't required to be as deeply steeped in the heritage of the Hebrew Bible as the evangelists and Nephite writers were, some awareness of the metaleptic and typological character of the successor text is a necessary element of any adequate reading.

Just as Mark ensconces his narrative of the Baptist's death within the ancient tradition Christians inherited from the Jews — especially the Purim connections to the Esther narrative — he connects his narrative more generally to the

> moral principles and laws, to the implications of earlier stories for the present, to the issue of liberation from ethnic harassment and violence, and the moral and social responsibilities of the people of God. In the case of the Esther retrieval, Mark recalls the story of a genocidal plot averted through God's intercession on behalf of "Israel," an action occurring outside the realms of chance and causality that is celebrated as "purim."[104]

The main signpost nudging the reader to connect the unbalanced "kings" Ahasuerus and Antipas is their reckless fill-in-the-blank promise that "whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give it thee, unto the half of my kingdom" (Mark 6:23). "The Esther story, like the John the Baptist episode, deploys a number of folklore motifs: a corrupt and

103. Schildgen, "Blind," 120.
104. Ibid., 121.

ineffectual king, opulent court life, manipulative or treacherous villains, innocent male and female victims, and an impossible situation."[105] Asserting no claim to originality, but following from a view that past events repeat themselves and are sometimes fulfilled decades, centuries, or millennia later, the gospels assert the history of the descendants of Abraham and the people of Israel are repeated in the life of Christ and his disciples. "Mark situates these in a context that connects them to the earlier text by restatement and by lexical and situational parallelism, which typologically connects the later event with an earlier or future event."[106] This is exactly what happens in the story in Ether as the daughter of Jared attaches her actions and those she urges her father to engage to antique patterns, and Moroni associates typologically to the Nephite events in his own day while also warning that his latter-day readers will persist in theirs. The account is explicit in asserting its typological designs.

"Originality Is Undetected Plagiarism"[107]

Additionally, like the New Testament narratives, the Book of Mormon story makes no attempt at originality. It is deliberately archaizing; when the daughter of Jared proposes her plan, she points to older patterns of monarchical succession: "Hath [my father] not read the record which our fathers brought across the great deep? Behold, is there not an account concerning them of old that they by their secret plans did obtain kingdoms and great glory" (Ether 8:9). A character within the story makes the association to older patterns (before the biblical account of the separation of peoples at the Tower of Babel), and the editor relates the narrative of Jaredite leadership corruption, decline, and self-annihilation to his own people's impending extinction. Moroni, son of Mormon, connects the story to others both past and future; Moroni notes that the Jaredites "formed a secret combination, even as they of old" (Ether 8:18). These secret combinations, older than antiquity even to the Jaredites, circulated among the Lamanites of Moroni's day. The narrator made the pattern relevant from the past and updated the concern to his day (even the evil characters within the narrative told by Moroni — the daughter of Jared in this case — can "liken the scriptures to themselves" along with nonscriptural records to Jaredite events). Moroni makes the

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105. Ibid., 122, citing Niditch.

106. Ibid., 129.

107. This *bon mot* is most commonly attributed to William Inge but has also been ascribed to many other writers.

link clearer because he notes that these conspiracies "have caused the destruction of this people of whom I am now speaking, and also the destruction of the people of Nephi" (Ether 8:21) while relaying the story of the earlier extinguished people, the Jaredites. If the archetypal nature of these actions isn't sufficiently evident, Moroni projects their danger to the future as a warning about these perils to the Gentiles (Ether 8:23). The Book of Mormon contains a theory of history; societies repeatedly make the same mistakes just as descendants repeat ancestors' actions: in brief, history repeats. That historical theory must become part of the interpretive background rather than having fragments of the narrative torn from context to justify glib readings. The text's own theory of textuality and of history must be clarified and considered; the modern reader doesn't have to accept the historical theory of repetition that the ancient text asserts, but that reader needs to make that theory explicit and engage it in order to understand the text.

After this digression about universal themes, Moroni returns to the Jared story. Omer escapes the murderous combination, and Jared becomes king, only to be beheaded by Akish, who succeeds Jared. This conspiratorial act then infects the entire Jaredite nation as Akish administers "the oath of the ancients" to his conspirators (Ether 9:6).

This story plainly tells readers not to expect originality. Yet modern readers criticize it for not being sufficiently original. Any adequate reading must recognize that "Nephite typology is more than a literary feature; it acts as a revelation of the divine scheme of history."[108] The Book of Mormon intends its stories to illuminate these universal truths: "The plots are formulaic and repetitive because the Book of Mormon presents history following universal patterns. Thus, by presenting a repetitive history and familiar types of characters, the Book of Mormon makes statements about the universal nature of human experience and social history."[109]

Listening More Carefully to the Text

Linguistics teachers often perform an exercise with their students wherein they have them invent words, which the students do with gusto. The next phase is to show the students that they have been following rules unawares, "rules that determine precisely which kinds of syllables they can imagine and which they cannot: e.g., that they will not imagine

108. Mark D. Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1999), 11.

109. Ibid., 15.

a syllable that begins with the last sound in the word *sing*, for instance, or begin a syllable with an *ft*. And from this the students gain two lessons." One is that when we acquire language, we learn a complex of rules quite arbitrary but powerfully influential. The second is that once the student becomes aware of those rules, he or she can easily devise syllables to transgress them.[110] Similarly with Brodie/Ham's assumptions about what makes for history, if critics were aware of their conjectures and the resulting explanations ruled in or ruled out by such presuppositions, all would benefit. What is generally true of historians is *a fortiori* true of Mormon historians: "Most historians obfuscate the theory behind their work and rely on implicit theory instead of explicitly formulated theory."[111] Ours is a theoretical age in which a writer's presuppositions require explicit articulation and theoretical elaboration. Those who think they operate without ideologically inflected assumptions and theories and just engage the text that speaks for itself must understand that theory is implicit if it isn't explicit; to assert that one approaches explanation without presuppositions, ideologies, and commitments is to adhere to a theory called positivism. Applying the conventional wisdom of the modern age is most often a strategy for clinging stubbornly to the theory of the age just before the current one.

Dismissing accounts as plagiarisms or folkloristic borrowings may satisfy some readers, but we ought to recognize that "universal story motifs quickly infiltrate accounts of historical events."[112] Jared's dancing daughter incorporates a universal motif. That it is unhistorical has yet to be argued rather than conclusorily asserted. "It ought to be a rule in dealing with scriptural texts that any time they make us very uncomfortable and we are tempted to deny them, expunge them or explain them away, that is precisely when we need to listen to them even more carefully and avoid dismissing them. Perhaps the problem lies with our assumptions rather than with the ancient texts."[113] When Brodie, Ham, or even lesser Book of Mormon critics make explicit their interpretive rules, we can then better analyze the textual relationship between similar Book of Mormon and Bible stories.

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110. Thomas J. Roberts, *When Is Something Fiction?* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), x.

111. Norman J. Wilson, *History in Crisis? Recent Directions in Historiography* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999), 54.

112. Flory, *Archaic*, 155.

113. Ben Witherington III, "Laying Down the Law: A Response to John Gager," *Bible Review* 15, no. 2 (Apr. 1999): 42.

I have been arguing three-plus decades for a more sophisticated approach to Book of Mormon textuality; we have seen the beginning stages of such appreciation over the past 40 years. The transformation in both Book of Mormon readers and Book of Mormon readings now should follow the lead of changes in biblical criticism over the past generation. Thomas Brodie, a biblical critic himself and not merely my attempt to write a "Good Brodie, Bad Brodie" scenario into my narrative, summarizes the evolution nicely, and his point is much larger than the specific context in which he explores oral composition and the biblical text. During much of the 20th century, biblical critics were persistently taught in graduate schools, and overwhelmingly accepted the notion, that the Bible is a primitive text composed by writers and consumed by listeners and readers who were, well, stupid. The text suffered in comparison to classical Greek and Roman writings. Speaking of the Hebraic writers and more generally about Hebraic narrative, he notes the condescension, "Again, [the writers and audience] were uncultured people" who in hearing and writing oral tradition "could cope only with little episodes," so the book of Genesis, for example, was a hodgepodge of fragments, disunified and often incoherent.[114] Hermann Gunkel's[115] attitude toward biblical composition was representative of the profession rather than aberrant.

This direction has reversed, and biblical criticism is now much more likely to read the text as a complex literary composition with a sophisticated intellectual narrative framework that accounts for the text's theory of history. Some of that contemptuous outlook toward ancient texts and audiences persists in the discipline, but "given such an attitude, it becomes more understandable how, even when faced with a superb writing, magnificently crafted, Gunkel's imagination jumped to something naïve or simple."[116] A similar revolution has occurred over the past 40 years in New Testament criticism. Mark and the other synoptic gospels were previously viewed as a conglomeration of disjointed found objects gathered by tinkers and plagiarists of the Hebrew Bible who were sometimes competent to stitch together narrative elements but never able to bring the compositions up to literary standards of a unified text

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114. Thomas L. Brodie, *The Birthing of the New Testament: The Intertextual Development of the New Testament Writings* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2004), 54.

115. Gunkel, 1862–1932, was the founder of biblical form criticism and the influential history of religions school.

116. Ibid., 54–55.

to achieve pinnacles that we might call masterpieces of world literature worthy of comparison to Genesis, other selected parts of the Hebrew Bible, works of literature and history written by Greeks, Romans, Chinese, Russians, Germans, British, French, Americans, and other historians, novelists, and historians/novelists too numerous to name or nationalize. The founders of modern biblical criticism (of both the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible) too often were disdainful of the texts they specialized in analyzing,[117] and that scorn prevented them from reading the complexity of writing and the audiences' sophistication in reading those texts, a fault at least partially remedied by the current generation of biblical critics. "Many New Testament scholars have now reached the conclusion that the gospels are fine writings"[118] that require the highest literary skills to be read with scholarly adequacy and appropriate presuppositions in order to be understood as master works of the ancient world, and not just run-of-the-mill fare written by semi-literate and half-civilized writers, but "the issue is not whether the gospels are works of genius and inspiration that portray God-based freedom. They are."[119]

Biblical scholars, from the birth of their discipline at the inception of modernity, have viewed their calling to be scientific and historical — the opposite (they thought) of literary. But the past four decades have changed that orientation, for the understanding has dawned and has now advanced to midday that historical skills divorced from literary talents (in both writer and reader) misappropriate the text; in texts from antiquity (and the Bible in particular) the historical and the literary are so intricately and complexly interwoven as to be unravelable. Religious communities, as much as scholarly ones, need a shift of reading approaches, for "reading scripture is an *art* — a creative discipline that requires engagement and imagination, in contrast to the Enlightenment's ideal of detached objectivity. In our practices of reading the Bible, we are (or should be) something like artists." What is disagreeable to some in

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117. "The tragedy of Gunkel and Bultmann, scientifically speaking, is that despite their wonderful talents and contributions, they violated this first principle [that the biblical writers built upon prior biblical texts in sophisticated ways, a feature Brodie refers to as intertextuality]. Partly because of regarding the people as 'uncultivated' and the gospels as 'unliterary,' they effectively severed the fundamental relationship between biblical texts and the larger world of earlier writing, and left the biblical books stranded and fragmented." Brodie, *Birthing*, 85n4 (internal citations omitted).

118. Ibid., 55.

119. Ibid., 71.

calling for better reading habits in communities of faith is that "like every other true art, reading scripture is a difficult thing to do well. Strangely, we do not often mention this difficulty in church, in sermons or in teaching. Our attitude seems to be that interpreting scripture is a cut-and-dried kind of thing."[120] Davis and Hays note that Christians ought to emulate Jews in this regard, for one of the distinctions between the Jewish tradition and the Christian scriptural reading heritage is that "Jews have always revered the reading of scripture as the greatest and most difficult of all art forms."[121] Such artistic readings don't yield univocal readings or definitive answers, and we moderns abhor the requirement that our interpretations incorporate skillful close reading but also negative capability. Historical approaches without literary competencies fail to do justice to the subject matter. Good readers who have literary talents and close reading abilities to study the scripture brought forth by Joseph Smith have emerged recently in the restoration religious tradition: Terryl Givens,[122] Grant Hardy,[123] Bob Rees,[124] Joseph Spencer,[125] Adam Miller,[126] and I[127] (a list that is not comprehensive) have begun to model what such

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120. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, "Learning to Read the Bible Again," *The Christian Century* (April 20, 2004): 23–24, https://www.religion-online.org/articale/learning-to-read-the-bible-again/.

121. Ibid.

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

123. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

124. Robert A. Rees, "Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the American Renaissance," *Dialogue* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 83–112. Rees, "Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the American Renaissance: An Update," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 19 (2016): 1–16. Rees, "Inattentional Blindness: Seeing and Not Seeing the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 12 (2014): 33–47. Rees, *A New Witness to the World* (Salt Lake City: BCC, 2020).

125. Joseph M. Spencer, *An Other Testament: On Typology* (Provo, UT: Maxwell Institute, 2016).

126. Adam S. Miller, "Messianic History: Walter Benjamin and the Book of Mormon," *Rube Goldberg Machines: Essays in Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Kofford, 2012), 21–36.

127. Alan Goff, "Alma's Prophetic Commissioning Type Scene," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 51 (2022): 115–64, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/almas-prophetic-commissioning-type-scene/. Goff, "Vox Populi and Vox Dei: Allusive Explorations of Biblical and Book of Mormon Politeias," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 47 (2021): 1–80, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.

scholarly reading of Book of Mormon narrative, informed by literary sensitivity and adequate historical theories without being screened by modernity's blinders toward faith commitments, might look like as it matures.

Davis and Hays refer their readers to Paul's admonition, which Joseph Smith incorporated into the Articles of Faith, to consider scripture reading not just a religious experience but also an aesthetic one, and even more intensely religious in proportion to the beauty discovered: if we judge scriptures as we do works of art "to use Paul's language — more 'lovely,' more 'gracious,' more 'excellent,' 'noble,' 'worthy of praise' (Philemon 4:8)," our Christian devotion would also be formed to become more lovely, gracious, excellent, noble, and praiseworthy.[128]

As Davis and Hays note, a crucial ability in Christian reading of the Bible is the capacity to read the text at the same time "back to front" and "front to back." "The Bible must be read 'back to front' — that is, understanding the plot of the whole drama in light of its climax in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This suggests that figural reading is to be preferred over messianic proof-texting as a way of showing how the Old Testament opens toward the New."[129] But too often Latter-day Saint readers are too hasty to make a passage from Isaiah, Genesis, or Jeremiah mean only its messianic prophetic prediction fulfilled in the life of Christ as revealed in the New Testament or what it might mean to believers in the 21st century, skipping over what Ezekiel might have meant to Ezekiel and the Jews in exile, for example. The scripture also needs to be read "front to back," highlighting what it meant to its initial audience, but not confining its meaning to that original context. "Yet the Bible must also be read 'front to back' — that is, understanding its climax of the drama, God's revelation in Christ, in light of the long history of God's self-revelation to Israel."[130] We ought to be bold enough to reach for the plentitude and abundance of meaning in the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Speaking for a group of scholars at the Center of Theological Inquiry assembling "The Scripture Project," Davis and Hays assert that "we affirm that our interpretation of Jesus must return

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org/vox-populi-and-vox-dei-allusive-explorations-of-biblical-and-book-of-mormon-politeias/. Goff, "Types of Repetition and Shadows of History in Book of Mormon Narrative," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 45 (2021): 263–318, https://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/types-of-repetition-and-shadows-of-history-in-hebraic-narrative/.

128. Davis and Hays, "Learning."
129. Ibid.
130. Ibid.

repeatedly to the Old Testament to situate him in direct continuity with Israel's hopes and Israel's understanding of God."[131] That is the approach the Book of Mormon writers took when writing history in advance of its unfolding in addition to the retrospective glance: "And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins" (2 Nephi 25:26), wrote Nephi$_1$ more than 500 years before that humble birth.

As Davis and Hays assert for all Christians that the two Christian testaments are to be read in a unified way both back-to-front and front-to-back, so too that third testament of Christ — the Book of Mormon — needs similar readerly treatment. The scripture itself asserts such a reading approach a number of times. Mormon, with a primary audience of descendants of Laman and Lemuel but a secondary audience of latter-day Gentiles, asserts a relationship between the record he is adding to (the Book of Mormon) and the record of the Jews (the Bible): "Therefore repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus, and lay hold upon the gospel of Christ, which shall be set before you, *not only in this record* but *also in the record which shall come unto the Gentiles from the Jews*, which record shall come from the Gentiles unto you." Notice the direction of attestation between "this" (the Book of Mormon) and "that" (the record of the Jews): the Book of Mormon is given to witness to the truth of the Bible, not the other way around. "For behold, *this* is written for the intent that ye may believe *that*; and if ye believe *that* ye will believe *this* also; and if ye believe *this* ye will know concerning your fathers, and also the marvelous works which were wrought by the power of God among them" (Mormon 7:8–9). But the two witnesses are so interwoven that if one believes the Bible, then one will believe the Book of Mormon also.

We members of the Church of Christ more often use the Bible to attempt to prove the Book of Mormon true. But in a day when astute readers of the Bible such as Thomas Brodie find in the allusive and literary character of the Bible evidence that Jesus and Paul were never real historical people but merely fictional characters, the Book of Mormon testifies, using the same intertextual and literary features, that the historical and belletristic features are evidence not only of the historical nature of Book of Mormon narrative but biblical narrative also: *this* supports *that*.

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131. Ibid.

Readers professionally devoted to reading the Bible, as biblical critics are, too often assert its fictional rather than its historical nature because it demonstrates literary features such as allusion and intertextuality. Thomas Brodie's memoir traces the trajectory he followed as a Dominican priest in helping to uncover the constant intertextuality of the New Testament as it incorporated the Old Testament narrative material through allusion; this Brodie has the reading and literary skills to reveal the complexity of the writing in both parts of the Christian Bible. The failure of both Brodies is to see in such liberal narrative metalepsis and repetition not just that such writing techniques are literary but to mistakenly assert that to the extent writing is literary it can't be historical.[132] This assumption that the literary and the historical are mutually exclusive is a crude version of positivism that in contemporary historical theory and historiography has been decimated in the past 40 years, the same historical period in which views of biblical narrative have been equally revolutionized. Thomas Brodie goes so far as to assert that the Jesus and Paul characterized in (and in the latter case putatively authored a good portion of) the New Testament never existed as historical persons. He doesn't assert the less controversial claim that we can never uncover through the sources available to us (primarily the New Testament and early Christian writings) the historical figures of Jesus and Paul; he asserts they didn't exist, but were made up by schools of writers who transformed Old Testament sources into stories about Jesus and Paul, not entirely whole cloth but at least transferring old wine from Old Testament narrative wineskins into new receptacles. The Book of Mormon uses those same literary features to assert the truth and historicity of *that record of the Jews.* If the Bible needs to be read ambidextrously, both front-to-back and back-to-front at the same time, then the Book of Mormon simultaneously needs to be read left-to-right and right-to-left concurrently to provide a complex weaving of Hebraic scripture whose warp and woof both witness the grace of God manifesting in the gift of Jesus Christ. To shift to a different metaphor, remember the transparencies formerly used to project messages to large audiences? Sometimes we would overlay them on overhead projectors to build various levels of textual and graphic content into a layered message. That is how combining the First Testament, the Second Testament, and Another Testament provides a deeper picture of God's various interventions into human history and fills out the horizontal

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132. Thomas L. Brodie, *Beyond the Quest for the Historical Jesus: Memoir of a Discovery* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012).

human-to-human and vertical divine-to-human relationships manifest in scripture.

The Book of Mormon is just at the beginning of a similar scholarly revolution in understanding and appreciation, such as both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament underwent in the last two decades of the 20th century and continuing into the 21st. However, such an apotheosis requires readers to match the text and the appropriate reading approaches exhibiting a competent understanding of the relationship between history and literature in both the ancient and modern worldviews, of Hebraic narrative in particular. We have the texts to match the subject matter of God's graceful outreach to his children in ages past, present, and the past in the present: we now lack only sufficient readership to measure up to the texts.

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