



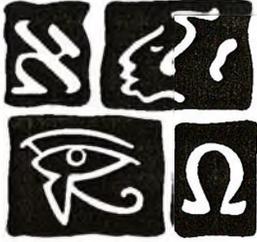
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Shakespeare and the Book of Mormon

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Robert F. Smith

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This F.A.R.M.S. preliminary report reflects substantial research but is not ready for final publication. It is made available to be critiqued and improved and to stimulate further research.

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SHAKE, SPEARE, A KICK IN THE REAR!

Perhaps the earliest and most consistently repeated claim made against the Book of Mormon is that Joseph Smith quoted Shakespeare at II Ne 1:14b. The claim began with Alexander Campbell and, until recently, nearly all anti-Mormons continued to repeat it in almost parrot-like fashion.¹ For, despite post hoc ergo propter hoc dangers, there is an undeniable similarity of expression between them:

Hamlet, III, i, 78-80, "But that the dread of something after death,/The undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns" (cf. Richard III, I, i, 128).

2 Nephi 1:14b, "the cold and silent grave, from whence no traveler can return."

Mosiah 3:25c, "a state of misery and endless torment from whence they can no more return."

Because he is acknowledged to have been an assiduous plagiarist, Will Shakespeare is hardly a dependable original source, and Mormon defenders have been quick to note that similar phraseology was available to Joseph and Shakespeare in the form of KJV renditions of Job:

7:9b-10, "So he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more./He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more."

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16:22, "When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return."

Or in Lord Byron's translation of Catullus' 1st century B.C. "Elegy on a Sparrow":
"Now having passed the gloomy bourne/From whence he never can return."

And, more recently, a non-Mormon U. S. Senator used the same style in referring to the abyss of total tyranny which America may face at the hands of the U. S. intelligence establishment--Frank Church on NBC-TV "Meet the Press," 19:33 (17 August 1975), p. 6:

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Even the prayer of the Worshipful Master during Masonic burial services comes into question (Grand Lodge of Texas, 1921, p. 13):

" . . . we may be enabled to prosecute our journey without dread or apprehension, to that distant country, from whose bourne no traveller returns."

Such examples can be multiplied ad nauseum either biblically (Pss 2:19, 39:13, II Sam 12:23), or extra-biblically--as we shall see--and it should be clear, first, that such phrasing was available to Joseph in several forms; second, that translation normally requires use of equivalent phrases in one's own language; third, that such an expression is as modern as it is ancient; finally, that such a phrase cannot be critically considered in isolation from its broader context simply due to its ubiquity, i.e., alone it proves nothing pro or con about the

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authenticity of the Book of Mormon. The facts can be made to fit any one of several scenarios of the most widely divergent sort, unless we broaden our purview somewhat.

Hugh Nibley showed us long ago what the contextual approach means and how it is to be applied, though he did no more than give us a few arresting glimpses into how well Lehi's and Shakespeare's imagery fits into the ancient Near Eastern context with regard to II Ne 1:14.² Indeed, Jerald and Sandra Tanner have now abandoned their single-minded devotion to the Shakespeare theory and have taken a broader, contextual approach, albeit of an anti-Mormon variety. This new sophistication is to be praised and adopts a policy long accepted by true scholars: Isolated instances of similarity can as easily as not be no more than coincidences. To say anything one way or the other, one requires a chain of circumstantial evidence--a pattern--and this has been the burden of Hugh Nibley's efforts throughout his career as a patternist historian. Thus, a dispassionate observer finds patterns from the ancient world being placed over and against patterns from the 19th century A.D. in order to show the "true" origin of the Book of Mormon. Unfortunately, neither side seems to pay a great deal of attention to what the other side is doing and saying. This is probably due to a sense of mutual disrespect or contempt, though Chris Eccel suggests the double-edged sword of cognitive dissonance in the face of information which does not fit in with one's preconceived world-view or religious tenets. I merely suggest that a calm view of both positions (in tandem), accompanied by familiarity with consensus in modern scholarship, might lead to resolution for many who stick to only one side of the issue.

The broader approach taken by the Tanners focuses on a book once in the Manchester Library and, therefore, available to Joseph Smith, Jr. This was Josiah Priest, The Wonders of Nature and Providence Displayed (Albany, 1825), and is merely one of a number of published sources which anti-Mormons use to show that the Book of Mormon is a pseudepigraphon based on early 19th century A.D. sources. For example, not only does Priest provide us with a phrase closer still to II Ne 1:14b, on page 469,

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However, where does the current anti-Mormon approach leave us? It leaves us with a picture of an extraordinarily well-read raconteur in Joseph Smith, Jr. A young man with a well-integrated mind/personality, and a level of intelligence anywhere from brilliant to genius. Thus, despite his lack of formal education, he managed to assimilate a tremendous amount of data from the broadest possible range of sources available in his immediate area. Whether we follow Robert Hullinger in seeing Joseph as engaged in a noble but misguided "defense of God," or (with most of his detractors) see him as an impetuous fellow out to satisfy his lusts for power, money, etc., we are then left with the question of coherence:

3. Case, III (1971), 91-3; Mormonism: Shadow or Reality? enl. ed. (1972), pp. 84-5 (a revised ed. has now been published by Moody Press as The Changing World of Mormonism, 1980).

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Within reason, are the sources available in the early 19th century sufficient to explain the origins of the Book of Mormon in naturalistic terms? Does the naturalistic theory cohere with the facts? It might be nice to say "yes" and have done with it—as many an anti-Bible free-thinker did with the Bible in the 19th century!! It is at least a convenient solution to the nagging problem of having to engage in never-ending and unpredictable research projects. Surely one can find things to do which are more "fun." In fact, the case made by the anti-Mormons is compelling as far as it goes, and one unfamiliar with modern scholarship is particularly vulnerable to their claims of clear-cut evidence. Unfortunately, the evidence is anything but clear-cut, and explaining how Joseph Smith, Jr., might have been able to put together a piece of 19th century A.D. fiction liberally laced with data not known to the scholars of his day is perplexing to say the least. Most anti-Mormons speak only disparagingly of this other side of the case which they are unable to explain away with their 19th century patterns. Others hew to the Satanic-inspiration theory to explain such remarkable ability and knowledge, and can certainly find biblical precedent for their approach.⁴ In the end one is faced with evidence in conflict with itself with but one scholarly way out of the dilemma: Occam's Razor. Parsimony. The explanation which does the least violence to the facts is the better. No matter that we are left with plenty of imponderable details. A good many people found themselves in a similar quandary immediately following the ministry of Jesus. Who, or what was he? Did he in fact rise from the dead? Are those who believe that to have been the case merely naive, credulous fools? There is an abundance of conflicting "evidence," and it is chic to laugh at the Bible for most of the same reasons that it is chic to guffaw at the Book of Mormon and its pitiable adherents. Why? Why, indeed!

The Context

The present state of research permits us to take the entire section of II Nephi 1:13-15 and to demonstrate that the constellation of ideas and expressions found there (and in parallel texts) were available from Mesopotamia to Egypt in Lehi's own time—especially in Egypt. I have appended a chart with some of the midrashic possibilities, but the chart should not be taken to mean that Joseph Smith could have put such a section together from the literature of his day (including biblical literature).

Even the book of Job does a lot of borrowing of ideas and imagery. It is dated by W. F. Albright to the 7th or early 6th century B.C., and he feels that the composition was made in North-Israel, or near Phoenicia. As evidence of this, Albright notes the contemporary Phoenician usage of the name of the Egyptian Moon-god, Thoth, in the same vocalization as is found in Job 38:36.⁵ Job also contains material very similar to the earlier hymn of Pharaoh Akhnaton to the Sun-disk Aton. Phoenicia is thus a likely intermediary in the transmission of certain Egyptian features to Classical Israel.⁶ I limit my comments here to Job only because of the claims that Lehi or Joseph must have been cribbing from a Shakespeare who sounds suspiciously like Job. However, the Bible is replete with such parallels. In any case, our horizons go beyond the Bible.

In a work wholly dedicated to the concepts contained in II Ne 1:13-5, J. Zandee gives us some important clues as to just what this horizon is like.⁷

4. W. Paul Johnson, A Criticism of the Book of Mormon (Red Oak, Iowa: n.d.); Lorna C. Hays, "Mormonism...Christian or Cult," Utah Evangel, XXVII:1 (Jan 1980), 7-8, citing II Cor 11:13-15, and Gal 1:8.

5. Albright, YGC, pp. 212-7, 220, 224 (London ed., 1968).

6. M. H. Pope, Job, Anchor Bible 15 (Garden City, 1965), p. lxxvii; cf. Ps 104.

7. J. Zandee, Death as an Enemy: According to Ancient Egyptian Conceptions (Leiden: Brill, 1960), pp. 2, 7-10, 54-6, 93-4, and passim.

Lehi's declaration that death is an enemy which can be defeated, for example, is in accord with ancient Egyptian belief. Death "was the source of eternal life for mankind. According to the Egyptians man becomes in death the peer of the gods."⁸ Zandee⁹ and S. Mowinckel seem to share the view that Semites held a dualistic conception of death, the latter saying that "neither Israel nor early Judaism knew of a faith in any resurrection nor is such a faith represented in the psalms"! However, Mitchell Dahood, in criticizing and refuting this notion, has provided us with not a few examples of a biblical paradisiacal "Elysian Fields" concept, e.g., Pss 5:9, 36:9-10, 61:14, 97:11, 116:9, Isa 26:11, etc.¹⁰

Moreover, the fact that 'ereš, "earth; netherworld," and capar, "dust, mud; netherworld," appear in parallel in Hebrew, Ugaritic,¹¹ and Book of Mormon sources is an important indication that Lehi needn't have been a pro-Egyptian revisionist of Hebrew religion. Yet it is a fact that the OT is lacking in any clear and unambiguous statements on this issue. Hence the need for our concern for the clearly monistic Egyptian belief in a life after death. True, there were parallels with the negative Semitic idea of She'ol (= Sumerian KUR), and Lehi's statement, out of context, might seem to compare well. The concept is an old one:

May you not go on the roads of the western ones [the dead];
They who go on them [travellers] do not return.

Pyramid Text 2175ab¹²

There is nobody who returns from there.

Papyrus Harris 500, col. VI, line 8

Behold, there is nobody who has gone, who has returned.

Ibid., VII, 2-3¹³

None that have gone have come back.

Song of Vizier Paser, line 12¹⁴

Zandee speaks of this also as the Babylonian concept of the netherworld: iršit lā tārī, "land without return"—"where dust is their nourishment and mud their food."¹⁵ Here we may compare the Sumerian KUR.NU.GI₄, "land of no return."¹⁶

8. Zandee, op. cit., p. 7, citing Kristensen, Het leven uit de dood [Life From Death], pp. 40-41.

9. Zandee, op. cit., pp. 1, 7.

10. Dahood, Psalms 1-50, Anchor Bible, p. xxxvi; cf. N. J. Tromp, Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament, BiOr 21 (Rome, 1969), reviewed in JSS, 16:108-9.

11. S. Gevirtz, JNES, 20:43; Dahood, op. cit., p. 43, n. 6.

12. Following Zandee, op. cit., p. 10; cf. K. Sethe, Pyramidentexte, II (N. 1160-61), or R. O. Faulkner, Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts (Oxford, 1969), for Pyr. refs.

13. Both examples from the Song of King 'Intef; Zandee, op. cit., p. 55, citing M. Lichtheim, "The Songs of the Harpers," JNES, 4:192-3, and W. M. Müller, Liebespoesie, XII, 8; XIV, 2; cf. Song of Neferhotep I.

14. Zandee, loc. cit., citing Lichtheim, op. cit., pp. 202-4.

15. Zandee, op. cit., p. 7, citing C. Bezold, Babylonisch-Assyrisches Glossar, 69b; cf. Nibley, n. 2, above, for other examples; see also L. W. King, Babylonian Religion, pp. 179-80; Descent of Ishtar, obverse, line 8.

16. CAD, E, 308, kur.nu.gi₄.ā = KI-tim, or = er-se-et la tari, citing the lexical series of Antagal G 20, and Lu Excerpt, II, 65; AHW, 245a, has KUR.NU.GE₄; cf. ANET,³ pp. 107a, 108ab.

On her descent into the Netherworld, the gatekeeper of the Netherworld asks the goddess Inanna:

Why, pray, have you come to the 'Land of No Return,'
On the road whose traveler returns never,
How has your heart led you?

Sumerian Descent of Inanna¹⁷

The Semitic version of the same story has lines similarly applicable to Lehi's imagery:

To the house from which he who enters never goes forth;
To the road whose path does not lead back.

Descent of Ishtar, obv., lines 5-6.

However, as Zandee demonstrates, most Egyptian sources exhibit a strongly positive view of resurrection and eternal life, and these sources closely parallel the very words of the full context of II Ne 1:14:

Rise, shake off your dust!

Coffin Text, Spell I, 71ab

Raise yourself, throw off your dust, . . . loosen your bonds, . . . !

Pyramid Text, 1363ac (following Faulkner); Coffin Text, III, 248ae

Raise yourself, shake off the dust of the earth which is on your flesh!

Pyramid Text, 654ad (following Faulkner & Zandee)

Throw off your dust, loosen your bonds!

Pyramid Texts, 2008ab; 2009a (following Faulkner)¹⁸

Your ties are loosened!

Pyramid Text, 593b

Zandee hints that these ties (ts.t) or bands of death are not necessarily mummy bandages.¹⁹ Egyptian ts also means "knot; vertebra," which shows a semantic range sufficient to include the idea of "chains" (II Ne 1:13) as well. Zandee lists a host of other words which have similar meanings and usage, noting in particular Pyramid Text 2202:²⁰

Horus comes to you, that he may loosen your ties, that he may burst your chains!

Sleep too is a major aspect of death, as we see in Pyramid Text 1975ab:²¹

You go away and return, you sleep and wake up.

Other examples are:

Truly, I live (again), after having fallen asleep [sdr].

Book of the Dead, 41, 111 (Theban rec.)

You who hates sleep [qd], who is made tired, rise!

Pyramid Text, 260b

17. S. N. Kramer, Sacred Marriage Rite (Indiana Univ., 1969), p. 112.

18. All these Egyptian examples cited in Zandee, op. cit., pp. 104-5.

19. Zandee, op. cit., p. 108.

20. Ibid., pp. 20-1, 78-81.

21. Ibid., pp. 81-85; this and following two examples.

So also for Lehi's concept of the "silent grave": Egyptian 'Igrt is the name of the realm of the dead--also t3 'Igrt, "Land of Silence" (from gr, "be silent"), while the god of the dead (Osiris) is called the "Lord of Silence."²²

Landing at the land that loves silence.

Song of Neferhotep I, line 9

There is no coming back.

Ibid., line 2423

Other of Zandee's observations may also be found to be pertinent to Mormons, e.g., on the second death,²⁴ sin,²⁵ etc.

Lehi's statement in II Ne 1:15 (probably intended as a kind of "prophetic perfect"),

But behold, the Lord hath redeemed by soul from hell!

is paralleled in the final chapter of the same chiasitic book (II Ne 33:6) as well as biblically (see the attached sheet). Lehi's use of the broad ranging store of ancient Near Eastern images and styles of expression did not prevent his adherence to a truly Hebraic religious view, eschatological and apocalyptic as it may have been.

This should give some hint of what lies in store for those who systematically apply knowledge of Egyptian language, religion, and culture to an understanding of the Book of Mormon--a book written in Egyptian language!! This also demonstrates that the purported Shakespearian quote can hardly be given credence as something from a late period. Shakespeare is a relative latecomer to the phrase, and his context doesn't even fit as well as Lehi's does the complete ancient Near Eastern image of death and the netherworld, though I have provided a mere sampling of that context here. If later phrasing just happens (perhaps not so coincidentally) to fit certain portions of our context, then so much the better for Joseph--whose burden was to provide a contemporary mode of expressing such terms insofar as his own private education allowed. The parallels with the KJV and with other books available to Joseph cannot be taken as anything more than this effort at making a good, modern translation, simply because the ancient Near Eastern parallels are so much closer and better integrated in the Book of Mormon than the later examples.

22. Ibid., pp. 12, 53.

23. Ibid., citing Lichtheim, pp. 195-6; cf. ZÄS, 65:122.

24. Ibid., pp. 20, 186-8.

25. Ibid., pp. 41-4.

Chart Attachment

II NEPHI 1:13-15
(RLDS 1:27-29)

13. O that ye would awake;
Awake from a deep sleep¹,
Yea, even from the sleep¹ of hell,
And shake off² the awful chains³ by which ye are bound,
Which are the chains which bind the children of men, Alma 5:9-11
That they are carried away captive
Down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe!
14. Awake! And arise from the dust⁴,
And hear the words of a trembling parent,
Whose limbs⁵ ye must soon lay down
In the cold and silent grave⁶,
From whence no traveler can return⁷;
A few more days
And I go the way of all the earth⁸.
15. But behold,
The Lord hath redeemed my soul⁹ from hell¹⁰;
I have beheld his glory,
And I am encircled about¹¹ eternally
In the arms¹¹ of his love.

II Ne 8:24-5; Judg 5:12;
Isa 26:19, 51:17, 52:1

Isa 14:15 še'o'

Prov 15:11, Lk 16:26

šp. šh+ nr. šat+ *Pi; dea-

Isa 26:19, 51:17, 52:1-2,
Ps 90:3 šar

Ps 88:4 (5, Heb)* yrd

Ps 30:3,9 (4,10, Heb)

Josh 23:14 'eres

II Ne 33:6; Pss 56:13, 86:13,
116:8, 16 še'o'

This theme is elaborated on in vss. 21-3, but in general see the OT and NT perspectives in Howard N. Bream, "Life Without Resurrection: Two Perspectives from Qoheleth," in H. N. Bream, R. D. Heim, and C. A. Moore, eds., A Light unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers, Gettysburg Theological Studies IV (Phila.: Temple Univ., 1974), 49-65.

1. Pyr. 260b, 1975; BD (Theban recension); Arabic innaumu 'ahu-'Imauti, "sleep is the brother of death" (Lane), Ugaritica, VI:184:1.
2. Coffin Text, Spell I, 71ab; Pyr. 2008ab; 2009a; 654a; 1363a.
3. CT III, 248ae; Pyr. 593b, 1363ac; 2202; Ps 18:5-6 (Heb).
4. CT I, 71ab; Pyr. 654ad; 1363ac; 2008a; 2009a; 260b; Eg. hmw, "dust"; Albright, YGC, p. 66, n. 49, in Amarna letters; cf. Gn 3:19, 18:27; see also n. 8, below.
5. Pyr. 654; 2008.

6. CT V, 26a; Neferhotep I, 9; Eloq. Peas., 20, 12; BD (Theban rec.); the Vizier and H.P. of Amon under Amen-hotep III said (on his monument): "I have reached this (state) by silence and coolness," A. Varille, BIFAO, XXX (1930), 504, cite in J. Wilson, CAE, 299, n. 33.
 7. Pyr. 2175ab; Antef VI, 8; VII, 2-3; Paser, 12; Neferhotep I, 24; Job 7:9-10, 10:20-1, 14:12, 16:22.
 8. Pyr. 654ad; BD Ib (Theban rec.), sm3 t3, "burial, union with the earth"—going into the Netherworld; U. Cassuto, Tarbiz, 14 (1942), 1-10, for parallel of "earth"//"dust," #1 (Heb.).
 9. Eg. k3 (ku'), "soul, spirit," arms extended upward; Gardiner, E.G., p. 172, Sign List D 29.
 10. Pyr. 1975a; II Ne 33:6.
 11. Eg. inq, "envelop," and hpt, "embrace," using the encircling-arm sign; see Gardiner, EG, §24, and Sign-list D 32; Pyr. 1341; 1629; Gardiner & Davies, Tomb of Amenemhet (Thebes), 10, 27; Shipwrecked Sailor, 6; Sinuhe, P, 143; Sethe & Helck, Urkunden der 18. Dynastie, 229, 4; Grapow, Religiöse Urkunden, 48, 6; Pyr. 375, Qwy//k3.
- #On Eg. Baal Epic and Ps 88:4-6, see YGC, p. 123, n. 80 (including IQIs, yrd).