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## **Finding Parallels: Some Cautions and Criticisms Part One**

Benjamin L. McGuire

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# FINDING PARALLELS: SOME CAUTIONS AND CRITICISMS PART ONE

*Benjamin L. McGuire*

*Review of Rick Grunder. Mormon Parallels: A Bibliographic Source. Layfayette, New York: Rick Grunder—Books, 2008. 2,088 pp. On CD-ROM. \$200.00.*

*Abstract: Discovering parallels is inherently an act of comparison. Through comparison, parallels have been introduced frequently as proof (or evidence) of different issues within Mormon studies. Despite this frequency, very few investigations provide a theoretical or methodological framework by which the parallels themselves can be evaluated. This problem is not new to the field of Mormon studies but has in the past plagued literary studies more generally. In Part One, this review essay discusses present and past approaches dealing with the ways in which parallels have been used and valued in acts of literary comparison, uncovering the various difficulties associated with unsorted parallels as well as discussing the underlying motivations for these comparisons. In Part Two, a methodological framework is introduced and applied to examples from Grunder's collection in Mormon Parallels. In using a consistent methodology to value these parallels, this essay suggests a way to address the historical concerns associated with using parallels to explain both texts and Mormonism as an historical religious movement.*

## Introduction

In this essay I will both assess the methods used to identify and analyze parallels, and review Rick Grunder's *Mormon Parallels*.<sup>1</sup> I have broken my material into two parts. First I look at the problem of parallels. I do so both generally, and in the context of Grunder's work as a whole—as a work of comparison between early Mormon sources and other material. This section will be a work of comparison—a comparison of comparisons so to speak—in which I place Grunder's work in a historical context. This context provides a useful starting point to examine the content of *Mormon Parallels*. I will include some discussion of the intentions behind such a comparison and how these comparisons have been used in a polemic against the faith of the Saints. I will also reference discussions critical of the use of parallels and more recent attempts to rehabilitate the practice.

I begin (in Part One) with a discussion of problematic assumptions in comparisons, and then (in Part Two) I turn to the flawed results of their use. My essay is an examination of the perils of what has been called *parallelomania*. Grunder is aware of this term (see p. 27, and the footnote<sup>2</sup> to the article in which it was first used). Other labels are available like “comparisonitis”<sup>3</sup>

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1. Rick Grunder has authored two works by the same name: *Mormon Parallels*. To distinguish between the two, I will be providing the date of publication. The earlier work is *Mormon Parallels* and is subtitled *A Preliminary Bibliography of Material Offered for Sale 1981–1987* (Ithaca, NY: Rick Grunder—Books, 1987). It documents 238 sources, compared to 500 in the later edition. It is also considerably shorter (about 125 pages compared to the later edition's 2,088). The later text is titled *Mormon Parallels: A Bibliographic Source* (Ithaca, NY: Rick Grunder—Books, 2008).

2. Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962): 1–13.

3. See, for example, Gian Biagio Conte, *The Rhetoric of Imitation: Genre and Poetic Memory in Virgil and Other Latin Poetics*, trans. by Charles Segal (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1986), and Bert Cozjensen, “A Critical Contribution to the *Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti*: Jude and Hesiod,” in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, ed. L. V. Rutgers, W. van der Horst, H. W. Havelaar, L. Teugels (Leuven: Peeters, 1998).

and “parallel hunting.”<sup>4</sup> *Mormon Parallels* is nothing if not a work of comparison.

But comparison is not a new endeavor, either for authors and their texts or for those studying religions. In fact, Grunder’s work belongs to a specific genre of comparative works. James Hanges has argued that

the comparative choice is often made because the . . . figures of interest do not stand alone, but in one sense or another represent a distinctive group or society, usually to one of which the comparing agent belongs. This is frequently the case when religion provides the backdrop against which the comparative choices are to be portrayed. The theoretical underpinning of this kind of comparison is the assumption that groups come into being because of the genius of a single individual—groups follow and preserve the teachings of extraordinary leaders.<sup>5</sup>

The interest in founder figures comes at least in part because of their significance to large groups of people. And these comparisons are not just limited to the individual; they expand their reach to include the teachings of founder figures as they have been preserved by their followers.

In his introduction, Grunder sets out “THE THESIS of my twenty-five year study,” which

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4. The “parallel hunter” is one of the oldest labels. It can be found, for example, in Ernest Henry Clark Oliphant, “How Not to Play the Game of Parallels,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 128/1 (1929): 1ff. See also Alexander Lindey, *Plagiarism and Originality* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1952), 60–61. There are many additional names that have been used, such as literary detective, literary investigator, and so on.

5. James Constantine Hanges, “Socrates and Jesus: Comparing Founder-Figures in the Classroom,” in *Comparing Religions Possibilities and Perils?*, ed. Thomas Athanasius Idinopulos, Brian C. Wilson, and James Constantine Hanges (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 143.

is that a very large part of what many of us have thought comprised the essence of Mormonism actually appeared in Joseph Smith's immediate world before it became part of Mormon language or thought. Most of the seeds of Joseph Smith's texts and prophecies enjoyed popular cultural dissemination in forms familiar to non-Mormons before they grew into scripture of the latter day. In surprising depth and degree, much of what Mormonism presents as if it were its own, actually flourished at various levels of society before Joseph Smith declared it. Enough solid evidence of this is now documented in reliable modern Mormon parallels, reasonably to suggest the presence—in Joseph Smith's natural environment—of the small portions which remain for us to discover (2008, p. 16).

Grunder is interested in what he terms the “essence of Mormonism”—and in discussing “Mormon language or thought” in terms of its founder, Joseph Smith. While not using the same terms, Grunder's comments fit the description provided by Hanges. Grunder makes comparisons involving Joseph Smith that fit into the theological backdrop of Mormonism. In fact, as Grunder describes it, a “Mormon Parallel” is an aspect “of Mormonism which first existed in a non-Mormon context available in Joseph Smith's world” (2008, p. 47). Grunder emphasizes the idea that virtually everything related to Joseph Smith can be found in and hence was derived from Smith's immediate environment.

This is like Abraham Geiger's arguments that

assert that Jesus said nothing original or unusual; ... Chwolson's comment is typical “A Jew reading the gospels feels at home.” By the early twentieth century, a cottage industry had developed of Jewish writers on the New Testament, seeking parallels between rabbin-

ic literature and the gospels; . . . Arthur Marmorstein concluded his study by claiming that Jesus said nothing new. Others sought to demonstrate that Jews could best understand the New Testament; the biblical scholar and Zionist leader, Hirsch Perez Chajes, wrote, “You have to be a rabbinical Jew, to know midrash, if you wish to fathom the spirit of Christianity in its earliest years.”<sup>6</sup>

Geiger’s *Das Judentum und seine Geschichte* (published in three volumes beginning in 1865) was among the first attempt to understand the New Testament from an exclusively Jewish perspective. I include this material for two major reasons. First, I wish to illustrate by example the idea of a history of the comparative method<sup>7</sup> used by Grunder. Second, I aim to provide examples of how this methodology can be applied to any particular text (in this case Grunder’s own introductory material). Whether this application is enlightening or misleading, however, will be shown to be an entirely separate question.

In this particular case, it is the person and the movement that make these comparisons seem both interesting and relevant. “The attention has,” according to Grunder, “seemed only appropriate to some of us whose daily walk and very universe depended from earliest childhood upon the religious Restoration movement of Joseph Smith Jr., 1805–44, the farm boy who talked with God” (2008, p. 15). Yet, the process of identifying similarities in this way can be done for any person in any milieu – including even Grunder. We don’t generally do so because we don’t see such attention as interesting or particularly fruitful.

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6. Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 235.

7. I am not using this phrase to refer exclusively to the use of parallels popularly described with this same title in the 19th century by Edward B. Tyler, James Frazer, and others. I am including the “parallel-hunters” and other similar kinds of endeavors that came before and after the “comparative method.”

Within the field of comparative literature this was eventually seen as a deeply flawed approach. Fernand Baldensperger, the first editor of *Revue de littérature comparée* gave his publication the motto: “The nature of things is more easily understood when one sees them grow, step by step, and when they are not viewed as being ready-made.” He contributed to the discussion with his comments in the first volume: “In the affirmative portion of his essay, the editor of *Revue de littérature comparée* underscores the significance of *mobility* in international cultural life: ‘Instead of considering great reputations as stars whose rise and orbit within a fixed heaven can be scanned, we should take into account the *mobility* of the planes from which the stars whose light will reach into the future have detached themselves.’ In the comparatists’ work yet to be done, the stress was to be laid on the second-rate writers and works including, one supposes, *Trivialliteratur* and the details hitherto neglected—to be uncovered only through extremely patient and painstaking labor.”<sup>8</sup>

If we take a single body of work and hunt down parallels to it, we lose sight of any development or difference, and see instead what Grunder wants us to see—a ready-made Mormonism just waiting to be borrowed. Lost to us (and to Grunder) are all the other elements of the environment that didn’t become a part of Mormonism, and the perspective that Mormonism was itself a part of the development of the environment in which it later existed. For Baldensperger, work on notable authors and texts was well underway – but it could only provide a partial understanding. The rest would come with the tedious examination of everything else.

To illustrate, I will, then, use Grunder’s technique on Grunder’s own work. I believe the exercise of comparing Grunder with other texts, as he compares the writings of ear-

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8. Ulrich Weisstein, *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory*, trans. William Riggan (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), 178.



ly Mormonism to other texts, will prove enlightening. As we will see, these comparisons are not likely to enlighten us at all about the origins of Grunder's thesis. I intend to show that Grunder fails to achieve his objectives—for the same reasons that my own interspersed parallels fail to point out the origins of Grunder's own theory.

Most current discussions of parallels do in fact address this subject (though Grunder does not). Many texts that deal with comparative elements have sections titled something like "The Problem with Parallels."<sup>9</sup> The difficulties arise from two distinct sources. The first deals with what it means to compare things, why we compare them, and how we can appropriately use parallels once we find them. The second deals with the identification of parallels themselves—what constitutes valid or significant parallels, and how we identify them.

Having laid the groundwork with an account of the historical discussion of the comparative method, the second part deals with questions of methodology. Here I discuss the issues involved in identifying parallels, gauging significance, and so on. I address the elements of methodology that Grunder describes in his introductory material, critiquing his work, and providing my own methodological framework that I then use to evaluate several of Grunder's bibliographic sources. In this way, specific parallels are graded using the methodology I present.

## Parallels and Expectations

Grunder explains that the sheer volume of parallels he has presumably located is overwhelming:

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9. See, for example, L. Michael White, John T. Fitzgerald, "Quod est comparandum: The Problem of Parallels," in *Early Christianity and Classical Culture Comparative Studies in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, ed. John T. Fitzgerald, Thomas H. Olbright, and L. Michael White (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 13–39, and Everett Ferguson, "Introduction: Perspectives on Parallels," in *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 1–4.

To the reader who may not be familiar with modern-era parallels, my assertions of their significant prevalence in the world of early Mormonism may sound overreached. In the face of distracting, assertive conclusions by prominent Mormon defenders who disregard these parallels, one might certainly ask what could drive a bibliographer to *excruciate* [sic] his way for decades through so many tedious books and papers written by generally obsessed religionists of the early nineteenth century who frankly needed to get a life. What has driven me to assemble the data which follow is the astounding contrast between ongoing dismissals of Mormon environmental origins by so many people, and the potentially overwhelming array of evidence which I find to the contrary. If defenders suggest that we have seen enough of the parallels to discount their overall value, I will point to the startling rate and degree to which even more exciting and corroborating examples continue to surface. (2008, p. 17).

In contrast to this point of view, the field of comparative studies recognizes that we should expect nothing less. There are two concerns. The first is that, simply put, if something exists within a historical setting, then it should conform to that historical setting, and that within that historical setting we should expect to find numerous correlations with other things that share that setting. Everett Ferguson holds that

another image from geometry that has been used to describe the relation of Christianity to its context is “parallels,” and these have caused various concerns to modern readers. This volume will call attention to a number of similarities between Christianity and various aspects of its environment. Many more could have been included, and probably many more than are cur-

rently recognized will become known as a result of further study and future discoveries. What is to be made of these parallels? Do they explain away Christianity as a natural product of its environment? Must they be explained away in order to defend the truth or validity of Christianity? Neither position is necessary. . . . The kind and significance of the parallels may be further clarified by commenting on the cultural parallels. That Christians observed the same customs and used words in the same way as their contemporaries is hardly noteworthy in itself. Those things belonged to the place and time when Christianity began. The situation could not have been otherwise for Christianity to have been a real historical phenomenon, open now to historical study. To expect the situation to have been otherwise would require Christianity to be something other than it is, a historical religion. Indeed, if Christianity did not have these linguistic and cultural contacts with the first-century Mediterranean world the presumption would be that it was a fiction originating in another time and place.<sup>10</sup>

We could simply substitute the word Mormonism for Christianity here. Mormonism is clearly rooted in both a place and time. And so we should expect it to use the same customs and words in the same way as its contemporaries. This feature, as Ferguson points out, isn't really all that interesting. For Ferguson, there are more than adequate reasons to dismiss the sheer volume of parallels as being "hardly noteworthy." Both Grunder and Ferguson note that the supply of such parallels is virtually limitless—so why then is this abundance of such interest to the one and of little interest to the other? Grunder suggests one possible reason:

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10. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 1–2.

For many Mormons who emphasize uniqueness in Joseph Smith's texts and doctrines, his supposedly matchless contributions are not only distinctive and advanced beyond the elements or syntheses seen in other faiths, but they exist quite independently of the man who dictated and taught them. Joseph's scriptures and interpretations thus become evidence of prophecy beyond mortal powers....since much of the perceived prophetic uniqueness of Mormon details will not stand. Be they ever so enthralling, most of Mormonism's splendid elements and combinations were neither impossibly super-human nor compellingly prophetic in the context from which they were spoken by Joseph Smith. (2008, pp. 15–16)

The appearance of these parallels suggests to Grunder that most of Mormonism's thought isn't original, isn't unique, and certainly shouldn't be viewed as anything other than representative of the environment in which it developed. Ferguson on the other hand, in reference to the same issue with early Christianity (which can also be portrayed in the same way) tells us this:

Where genuine dependence and significant parallels are determined, these must then be placed in the whole context of thought and practice in the systems where the contacts are discovered. Although Christianity had points of contact with Stoicism, the mysteries, the Qumran community, and so on, the total worldview was often quite different, or the context in which the items were placed was different. Originality may be found in the way things are put together and not in the invention of a completely new idea or practice. So far

as we can tell, Christianity represented a new combination for its time.<sup>11</sup>

Lastly, both Grunder and Ferguson speak on the issue of faith. For both of these writers, the issue of parallels isn't one that directly challenges faith. Grunder writes:

True faith deserves a full spectrum, and it is entirely appropriate to pursue its origins from all periods of history. Yet wherever modern parallels negate claims to exclusively ancient origins, one must be willing to see that fact, and to consider modifying one's claims without feeling that faith is necessarily compromised. (2008, p. 25)

In this Bibliographic Source, I attempt to discover and analyze some of history's components and syntheses: elements and their combinations (or likely potential combinations) which confirm my thesis. I tackle only concrete cultural records here, not their intangible spiritual bases. Whatever one deems to be spirit must remain subjective, quite beyond physical analysis. Faith, by scripture definition, is "the assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." I could hardly presume to reduce anything like that to technical patterns. That which is preserved physically in material form, on the other hand, can be tied down in some consistent manner, hopefully through honest and patient research. (2008, p. 26)

Likewise, Ferguson tells us:

Christianity presented itself as the result of a new act by God in human affairs, as a divine revelation. Its authority is not dependent on absolute originality in its

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11. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3.

teachings and practices. Many Christian believers in fact have minimized the originality in order to emphasize the divine preparation for Christianity. Christian claims rest on whether it is a revelation from God, not on its originality, and this is a claim not directly verifiable by historic examination. The decision for or against Christianity is a matter of faith, however much historical inquiry might support or discourage the decision.

Neither the truth nor the value of Christianity depends on its uniqueness. The contents of this volume point to a number of areas where Christianity was not exactly paralleled in its contemporary setting. But if none of these points should stand further examination or future discoveries, nothing essential to Christianity is lost.<sup>12</sup>

Like both of these writers, my objective is not to engage questions of faith. There is a subtle difference between these two notions—the one by Grunder and the other by Ferguson. Grunder is set to “discover and analyze some of history’s components . . . which confirm my thesis.” It is all about the parallels, the similarities. Ferguson on the other hand concludes by stressing what he has told us consistently—there are a “number of areas where Christianity was not exactly paralleled in its contemporary setting.” Parallels by themselves are rather uninteresting. We expect to find them when we compare anything—and even more so when we compare things that share common historical and cultural milieus. We are even more likely to find them when our thesis requires them and we search for them specifically. When we find them and we investigate them, however, ultimately it is the differences—the ways in which they are not exactly parallel—that provide us greater

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12. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 619.

understanding. My purpose in this review essay is to explore not just the similarities but also the differences, and to provide a more useful framework through which we can recognize the parallels that exist and use them in appropriate ways to illuminate our subjects.

### Part I: On Comparison

Ever since the notion of originality entered into the discussion of literature and religion, we have also seen those who challenge through comparison the originality of particular works and authors. The way this is accomplished is to produce lists of parallels—whether of texts, of artwork, or even of artifacts and practices. At times, such comparisons have been met with resistance:

Indefatigable parallel-hunters, who have sought to represent Mrs. Wilfrid Ward's "One Poor Scruple" in the light of a counter-blast to Mrs. Humphrey Ward's "Helbeck of Bannisdale," should read the former's prefatory note, in which she states that "One Poor Scruple" took her seven years in its making and that it was practically completed three years ago. The fact that each novel deals with the Catholic question and that the plot of each culminates in the suicide of a woman are simply curious coincidences.<sup>13</sup>

While illustrating the frustration that could be felt in this regard, this observation also shows the connection between the notion of comparison and the notion of originality. When we write, do we see our own works as either borrowing from or responding to the works of others? The question of comparisons (and the comparative method) is one of origins, and Grunder tells us that "finding the origins of Mormonism is a full-time

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13. Author unknown, *Public Opinion* 27 (New York, 1900): 158.

occupation” (2008, p. 11). Our first discussion deals with what it means to be original and to be unique. Grunder’s primary argument in his introduction is against this notion of originality or uniqueness. Here from his text I repeat a short section for contrast:

Much of the perceived prophetic uniqueness of Mormon details will not stand. Be they ever so enthralling, most of Mormonism’s splendid elements and combinations were neither impossibly super-human nor compellingly prophetic in the context from which they were spoken by Joseph Smith (2008, p. 16).

Of course Joseph had unique ideas. No two human beings are identical, but if every person who ever lived had at least one original thought, then my approach may be helpful—to search for an ever more expansive assessment of presumed Mormon uniqueness within an ever more responsible context. (2008, p. 23).

These two statements are somewhat contradictory. Grunder suggests that after the “small portion which remains” is discovered, what is left will be that which is original, and unique to Joseph Smith. But we are left with this problem of what it means to have an “original thought” at all. In his book *Production Culture*, John Thornton Caldwell describes an exchange between writer-producers Judd Apatow and Mark Brazill.

Caldwell provides the text of an e-mail exchange between the two that occurred in the fall of 2001 in which they argue over who was the one responsible for a creative idea. One of the e-mails from Apatow reads:

I know it’s hard to believe that your rock band TV idea, which every writer in this town has thought of at one point, was not on my mind half a year after you told it



to me. Yes, you thought of breaking the fourth wall. Groucho and George Burns stole it from you. Maybe you should sue *Bernie Mac*. Why don't you sue the guys who have that new show *How to Be a Rock Star* on the WB. I must have told them your idea. Nobody has ever goofed on rock bands, not *Spinal Tap* or *The Rutles* or 800 *Saturday Night Live* sketches. I should have told everyone on the show, no rock band sketches, that's Brazill's area. . . . See, I have no original thoughts.<sup>14</sup>

I suppose that it could be argued that to be original, it must be, in every way, alone. Even where there is no contact, a person might not be original because someone, somewhere else, has had the same thought. So what does it mean to be unique? What does it mean to be original?

### Uniqueness

There are different ways in which the term *unique* is used. When it first appeared, being *unique* meant that there was only one of something, or that it was without equal, or incomparable:

*Unique* dates back to the 17th century but was little used until the end of the 18th when, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, it was reacquired from French. H. J. Todd entered it as a foreign word in his edition (1818) of Johnson's Dictionary, characterizing it as "affected and useless." Around the middle of the 19th century it ceased to be considered foreign and came into considerable popular use. With popular use

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14. John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 208.

came a broadening of application beyond the original two meanings.<sup>15</sup>

Of course, as a term meaning *incomparable*, it has no value in comparison at all. As Jonathon Z. Smith notes, “The ‘unique’ is an attribute that must be disposed of, especially when linked to some notion of incomparable value, if progress is to be made.”<sup>16</sup> So Grunder tells us that

For many Mormons who emphasize uniqueness in Joseph Smith’s texts and doctrines, his supposedly matchless contributions are not only distinctive and advanced beyond the elements or syntheses seen in other faiths, but they exist quite independently of the man who dictated and taught them. Joseph’s scriptures and interpretations thus become evidence of prophecy beyond mortal powers. Some of Joseph’s defenders identify tangible components of their prophet’s work—specific text and concept details—which they believe Joseph could have obtained only through divine revelation. (2008, pp. 15–16)

However, we run into a problem. Not too much later Grunder admits that “the subject of early nineteenth-century Mormon antecedents cries out for a more sophisticated sense of history. Consider one recent collection of articles defending traditional Latter-day Saint positions, entitled ‘Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon.’ That compilation aspires to identify ‘more than one hundred hits or other evidences and ancient parallels’” (2008, p. 24).

The issue for Grunder isn’t really the implied uniqueness. We might more accurately say that he is referring to a

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15. In *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* (2010), s.v. “unique,” at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/unique>

16. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 36.

uniqueness perhaps in Joseph's immediate environment—because Latter-day Saints, like the early Christians that Ferguson alluded to, are intentionally downplaying true originality. Mormonism as a restoration movement wasn't claiming any kind of explicit originality or uniqueness. Rather it argued for a return to something that was perhaps unique or original (in the origins of Christianity). Grunder's issue isn't with the claim of originality or the lack thereof, but with the implications for divine revelation (which is very much an issue of faith, and not so much an issue of historical speculation). Jonathan Z. Smith continues:

The most frequent use of the terminology of the "unique" within religious studies is in relation to Christianity; the most frequent use of this term within Christianity is in relation to the so-called "Christ-event." . . . The uniqueness of the "Christ-event," which usually encodes the death and resurrection of Jesus, is a double claim. On the ontological level, it is a statement of the absolutely alien nature of the divine protagonist (*monogenes*) and the unprecedented (and paradoxical) character of his self-disclosure; on the historical level, it is an assertion of the radical incomparability of the Christian "proclamation" with respect to the "environment." For many scholars of early Christianity, the latter claim is often combined with the former so as to transfer the (proper, though problematic) theological affirmation of absolute uniqueness to an historical statement that, standing alone, could never assert more than relative uniqueness, that is to say, a quite ordinary postulation of difference. It is this illicit transfer from ontological to the historical that raises the question of

the comparison of early Christianity and the religions of Late Antiquity.<sup>17</sup>

As Smith explains here, the notion of uniqueness in the context of early Christianity deals with two separate and distinct concerns. On the one hand, there is the claim within Christianity of a Jesus that is absolutely incomparable (the ontological and theological claim). On the other hand there is a statement of an environmental uniqueness—that the historical process that produces Christianity was different (relatively speaking) from any other historical process. The problem occurs, as Smith notes, when we suggest that ontological and theological claims are identical with historical claims—and thus suggest that all we need to do to deny the ontological and theological claims is to demonstrate that the environment and the process is not unique by stressing similarities (and not differences).

This, of course, also describes Grunder's work of comparison. In his thesis statement, he tells us that "enough solid evidence of this is now documented in reliable modern Mormon parallels, reasonably to suggest the presence—in Joseph Smith's natural environment—of the small portions which remain for us to discover"—that is, there is nothing unique to Mormon language and thought that cannot be found in Joseph's environment. But, Grunder doesn't stop there. Speaking of those defending the faith of the Saints, he insists that

trying to strengthen spiritual belief in this manner is like building a house upon the sand, since much of the perceived prophetic uniqueness of Mormon details will not stand. Be they ever so enthralling, most of Mormonism's splendid elements and combinations were neither impossibly super-human nor compel-

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17. Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 39.

lingly prophetic in the context from which they were spoken by Joseph Smith. (2008, p. 16)

Just as Christian apologists are said to have done, Grunder has “illicitly” moved from a historical context to what might be called an ontological context. In a sense, though, and this is independent of Grunder’s arguments here about faith concerns within the Mormon community—an issue that I will address later—this is exactly the kind of approach that Smith, Ferguson, and a host of others are criticizing. In mapping out a way of moving forward from this predicament, Jonathon Smith writes: “What is required is the development of a discourse of ‘difference,’ a complex term which invites negotiation, classification and comparison, and at the same time, avoids too easy a discourse of the ‘same.’ It is, after all, the attempt to block the latter that gives the Christian apologetic language of the ‘unique’ its urgency.”<sup>18</sup>

In other words, Christian apologists developed this concept of “uniqueness” in response to charges that Christianity was not in any way unique (even if there was and is some validity to the arguments for an ontological uniqueness). Likewise, Grunder’s discourse of similarity will generally only bring out the same kind of response within the Mormon apologetic community. One purpose of this essay is to avoid this kind of confrontation. I will attempt to shift the discussion’s focus from sameness to difference. Doing this has been anticipated. In fact, Grunder predicts this response when he considers “three likely faithful responses” to his work.<sup>19</sup> But in any case, Grunder

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18. Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 42.

19. Grunder, *Mormon Parallels*, 2008, 27–31. In this case, this kind of response would fit category B—“Toleration of these parallels, with dissatisfaction.” I suppose that I fall in category A: “Utter disdain and disregard of the modern parallels.” Of course, since my reasons, and my approach are not at all similar to the explanation provided by Grunder, I may not fit any of his categories: “Many Mormon defenders will wrestle with these parallels and will emerge, predictably, victorious. They will suggest that these data, while colorful and even

is right about one issue. This back and forth debate engaging sameness as opposed to uniqueness does not and cannot provide a solution. One major reason is described in some detail in the introduction to Larry Hurtado's text, *Lord Jesus Christ*. He introduces two major lines of thought dealing with the development of the idea that Jesus was divine. The one group claims that there is nothing extraordinary about such a belief—it is easy to understand Jesus as divine simply because he was divine. The other group he describes “arose in large part in reaction against this naïve and ahistorical view.” For these, the notion of Jesus as divine wasn't particularly noteworthy either. After all, when viewed as a historical process, early Christian devotion could be seen as a natural expansion on “pagan” views. But of these two positions, Hurtado notes:

Before we proceed further towards analyzing Christ-devotion as a historical phenomenon, however, it may be helpful to note a relevant (and in my view misguided) assumption shared by both the pre/anticritical and the history-of-religion approaches. It is worth identifying because it continues to be influential in both popular and scholarly circles. This is the notion that the validity of a religious belief or practice is called into question if it can be shown to be a truly historical phenomenon, and the product of historical factors and forces that we can attempt to identify and analyze.... Wishing to preserve the religious and theological validity of traditional christological claims, the anticritical view attempted to deny or minimize as far as possible the historically conditioned nature of early Christ-devotion.

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interesting, are, in the end, meaningless. ‘Grunder,’ they may say, ‘has missed the point entirely, and has become lost in a jungle of parallelomania.’” From the title of my essay, my perspective ought to be fairly obvious. Grunder references Sandmel's well-known article on “parallelomania,” but, as will be discussed later on, he doesn't seem to understand the notion at all.

On the other hand, the history-of-religion scholars were convinced that their demonstration of the historically conditioned nature of early Christ-devotion proved that it was no longer to be treated as theologically valid or binding for modern Christians. In both views the assumption is the same: if something can be shown to have arisen through a historical process, then it cannot be divine “revelation” or have continuing theological validity.<sup>20</sup>

Hurtado sees the problem in terms of two sides competing with a similar but flawed set of assumptions. The assumption that Hurtado sees at work is that if something can be shown to arise through a historical process, then it cannot have been revealed. This is largely the same argument that Jonathon Smith provided. The one side attempts to show that because of the historical process, the subject matter cannot be revealed. The other side denies the historical process and simply claims revelation. Hurtado is quite clear about this: “The misguided assumption I am criticizing here has obviously worked mischief in scholarship. . . . It has led a good deal of historical-critical scholarship to opt for some simplistic historical analyses in the interest of opposing traditional Christian beliefs.”<sup>21</sup>

The notion is applicable to our discussion here, because the same principle is at work. Grunder describes the pre/anticritical Mormon view in very similar terms (speaking with the voice of such an individual): “We already accepted the transcendent truth of Joseph’s scriptures and teachings, so their evident pre-science (confirmed, we suggested, only by later scientific and historical scholarship) must prove their origins to be prophetic and divine” (2008, p. 15). On the other side, Grunder’s naïve

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20. Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: MI, Eerdmans, 2003), 8.

21. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 9.

historical-critical pose claims that Mormonism was “worked up naturalistically through elements available in Joseph Smith’s world” (2008, p. 30). A key aim of this essay is to point out (in agreement with Larry Hurtado) that this assumption is wrong. There is no question that Mormonism arises from a historical setting (one that can be studied). Its beginnings involved real people with real histories—all of whom started out as something other than a follower of the movement that would eventually be called Mormonism. But, in contrast to the idea that “most of Mormonism’s splendid elements and combinations” were there, in Joseph’s natural environment—and perhaps by extension that Mormonism’s language and thought wasn’t just produced from that environment, but that its existence was inevitable (and so it is utterly ordinary—and to some extent even irrelevant), my position mirrors that of Hurtado’s—early Mormonism was “an utterly remarkable phenomenon” at the same time that it was “also the result of a complex of historical forces and factors.”<sup>22</sup> In other words, the historical phenomenon certainly cannot be seen as unique in any sense of the word, and should not be seen as unique. But, ontologically, Mormonism presents us with something that is not ordinary, and is not commonplace. Grunder, on the other hand, has opted for a “simplistic historical analyses in the interest of opposing traditional [Mormon] beliefs.”

Of course, Grunder insists that what he is doing is proper. He offers a statement from Grant Underwood’s 2005 essay to support his program:

Bushman wants to tap the promise of [broader, transnational] comparative history and I agree, but religious devotees are sometimes skittish about comparative analysis because it seems to rob their particular religion of its uniqueness. They assume that uniqueness

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22. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 7.



is prime evidence of their faith's divine origin. Such thinking, however, confuses a religion's character with its source. Similarity and difference are descriptive categories; they say nothing necessarily about origin. (2008, p. 31).<sup>23</sup>

Grunder then grants that "Dr. Underwood goes on to caution against both the oversimplification and the misapplication of parallels (2008, p. 48), against which practices I, too, have aspired to warn throughout this *Bibliographic Source*" (2008, p. 31). And yet, Grunder has clearly misunderstood Underwood's point. Why? According to Underwood,

At times, parallelomania has been a problem in Joseph Smith studies as well. Was Joseph Smith (per Brooke) really a Renaissance magus redivivus? Is Mormonism (per Emerson) really an afterclap of Puritanism? Is the Book of Mormon (per Brodie or Vogel) just thinly veiled autobiography? Sometimes similarities can be so imaginative, they are imaginary. At least when Harold Bloom likens Smith's Nauvoo doctrines to the Jewish kabbalah, he is doing so comparatively, not genetically.<sup>24</sup>

Vogel's *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* is referenced and quoted with approval in *Mormon Parallels* dozens of time, often occurring in discussions about these origins mentioned by

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23. Grunder references Grant Underwood's, "Attempting to Situate Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 44/4 (2005): 47.

24. Underwood, "Attempting to Situate Joseph Smith," 48. Underwood specifically mentions in his footnotes John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: the Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Knopf, 1979); and Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of A Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004).

Underwood.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Grunder should have followed up on Underwood's references. He would have discovered something quite different than the enthusiastic endorsement he gives them. Underwood also tells us: "Inappropriate parallels are often a function of not knowing both sides of the comparison equally well. 'Two passages may sound the same in splendid isolation from their context, but when seen in context [they] reflect difference rather than similarity.'" <sup>26</sup> And this is often what we find in Grunder's sources. Grunder regularly misses the picture because he has fallen into the vices of the two-column style presentation of parallels. Underwood then refers us to William E. Paden on the issue of the comparative enterprise. Paden also presents a far different view of the comparative enterprise than we see from Grunder:

Comparison can create error and distortion as well as insight and knowledge, and this is noticeably so in the area of religion. Religious phenomena have been compared for centuries, but not necessarily in the pursuit of fair description or accurate understanding.

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25. Grunder cites and references both Brodie and Vogel. See for example, p. 474, where Grunder states: "If Fawn Brodie felt too confident about specifics of direct borrowing, she was yet ultimately right in the essence of what she saw." Or, "'Just like Nephi beheading Laban,' observes Dan Vogel, 'Smith's Adam finds it necessary to violate God's commandment against eating of the tree of knowledge in order to fulfill a higher law and bring about a greater good. Smith was not the originator of what is sometimes called the 'fortunate Fall,' but for more than obvious reasons, he was attracted to this otherwise obscure idea.'" (Vogel 2004, 412–13)" (2008, p. 670). Or this statement: "This new Mormon doctrine was given privately, to crucial supporters. 'A close examination of the revelation,' according to Dan Vogel, 'reveals that Smith privately believed in Universalism.' If that statement shocks, it should startle us no more than Joseph's sudden and total reversal of a vital, hotly debated doctrine that went to the very heart of American Christianity" (2008, p. 1901). Had Grunder understood and followed Underwood's advice, instead of merely parroting it, we should perhaps have expected to discover some of the same conclusions about Vogel's work.

26. Underwood, "Attempting to Situate Joseph Smith," 48. Underwood quotes Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," 2, 9.

Comparison is most often a function of self-interest. It gets used to illustrate one's own ideology. It easily becomes an instrument of judgment, a device for approval or condemnation.<sup>27</sup>

Paden lays out a “conceptual framework that avoids some of the past difficulties with comparative biases.” Among these guidelines (or rules), three are worth mentioning. “Where comparative analysis deals with similarity, it deals with analogy rather than identity, in which things otherwise unlike, are similar in some respects.” Parallels work in this way. We point out the things that are similar from within a context of difference—or as Ferguson noted, we have in fact a great many *in-exact* or *incomplete* parallels to examine. Paden goes on, “Comparative work is not only a process of establishing similarities or analogies. It is also the fundamental instrument for discerning differences.” Paden explains that there are unique elements in the various religions. They are not all the same—but the proper use of parallels is to help point out these unique features, not to hide them. Finally, Paden tells us that “comparison is not an end in itself.”<sup>28</sup>

While asserting that he has avoided the misapplication of parallels, in his *Mormon Parallels*, Grunder has missed all three of these important issues. He treats similarity as identity, he ignores difference in virtually every case, and for him the parallels themselves have become the end of the discussion—his assumption is not that we will discover something unique, but rather that everything will have parallels, and that there is very little (if anything at all) that is truly unique.

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27. William E. Paden, *Religious Worlds: The Comparative Study of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 2.

28. Paden, *Religious Worlds*, 4.

## Originality

What is originality? Undetected plagiarism. This is probably itself a plagiarism, but I cannot remember who said it before me. If originality means thinking for oneself, and not thinking differently from other people, a man does not forfeit his claim to it by saying things which have occurred to others.<sup>29</sup>

Once the notion of uniqueness is dispelled, those engaged in the use of parallels must then confront the closely-related notion of originality. In particular, originality became an issue when contemporary (often living) authors were placed under the microscope. It is one thing to be told that your ideas are not unique, but to be told that they are unoriginal is perhaps something altogether different. In this way, the two different meanings of unique tend to create two different perspectives. If being original means to be unique in the sense of being incomparable, then indeed there may truly be nothing original. If, on the other hand, being original means to be unique in the sense of being individual, then as Inge points out above, we can all claim to have original thoughts and create original texts. The strongest early responses to claims of plagiarism and unoriginality came from within the community of authors.<sup>30</sup>

In 1834, Johann Peter Eckermann published his highly influential *Gespräche mit Goethe*. When translated and published in English in 1836, this text recorded a series of conversations

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29. William Ralph Inge, "Stolen Epigrams," in *Labels & Libels* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1929), 227.

30. See, for example, the 1827 letter that he published in the November 3rd issue of the *Edinburgh Saturday Post*. Robert McFarlane notes that "in 1827 an infuriated Thomas De Quincy railed against the 'thousands of feeble writers' who 'subsist by detecting imitations, real or supposed.'" McFarlane also provides several additional early examples with the same kind of invective, *Original Copy: Plagiarism and Originality in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 41–42.

between Eckermann and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe over the last nine years of Goethe's life (1823–1832). One particular discussion is of interest here, from Tuesday, December 16th, 1829. Eckermann writes:

“Something similar,” said I, “often happens in the literary world, when people, for instance, doubt the originality of this or that celebrated man, and seek to trace out the sources from whence he obtained his cultivation.”

“That is ridiculous,” said Goethe, “we might as well question a strong man about the oxen, sheep, and swine, which he has eaten, and which have given him strength.”<sup>31</sup>

As the attacks on living authors became more personal, so did the responses. Alfred Tennyson wrote this in a letter to Dawson responding to criticism in Dawson's Canadian edition of *The Princess*:

But there is, I fear, a prosaic set growing up among us, editors of booklets, book-worms, index-hunters, or men of great memories and no imagination, who *impute themselves* to the poet, and so believe that *he*, too, has no imagination, but is for ever poking his nose between the pages of some old volume in order to see what he can appropriate. They will not allow one to say “Ring the bell” without finding that we have taken it from Sir P. Sidnet, or even to use such a simple expression as the ocean “roars,” without finding out the

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31. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Johann Peter Eckermann, and Frédéric Jacob Soret, *Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret*, vol. 2, trans. John Oxford (London: Smith, Elder, London, 1850), 109. See also the discussion in McFarlane, *Original Copy*, 92–94. Goethe's comments reflect a view of originality to which we shall return.

precise verse in Homer or Horace from which we have plagiarized it.<sup>32</sup>

Not long afterwards, Brander Matthews commented on these remarks:

A pleasant coincidence of thought is to be noted between these words of Lord Tennyson and the remarks of Sir Walter Scott about “Gil Blas.” Both poets think ill of the laborious dulness [*sic*] of the literary detective, and suggest that he is actuated by malice in judging others by himself. The police detective is akin to the spy, and although his calling is often useful, and perhaps even necessary, we are not wont to choose him as our bosom friend; the amateur literary detective is an almost useless person, who does for pleasure the dirty work by which the real detective gets his bread.<sup>33</sup>

Simply stated, on some level we can find a parallel to any source. An author may not recognize another’s text in his writings at all—even if parallels may be found. This isn’t to say that there isn’t literary plagiarism. But, the concern here is with mistakenly finding it when it may not actually have occurred. The parallel-hunters and plagiarism hunters of the 19th and early 20th centuries were not terribly concerned with the texts themselves, but instead with the list of possible sources that were used to create them. Earlier in his essay, Matthews quotes James Russell Lowell speaking on behalf of responsible higher criticism—“we do not ask where people got their hints, but

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32. Alfred Lord Tennyson, *The Works of Tennyson* (New York: Macmillan, 1916), 910.

33. (James) Brander Mathews, “The Ethics of Plagiarism,” in *Pen and Ink* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1902), 27. Matthews wrote this essay in 1886, and it was subsequently published in several venues.

what they made out of them.”<sup>34</sup> Lowell also makes this comment: “The owners of what Gray ‘conveyed’ would have found it hard to identify their property and prove title to it after it had once suffered the Gray-change by steeping in his mind and memory.”<sup>35</sup>

At some point, Lowell suggests, an idea is sufficiently changed or has become immersed in the thoughts of another that we lose the notion of ownership by a previous author. Alongside this return to an idea of originality came the early criticisms of the use of parallels to demonstrate textual reliance. Matthews makes this comment on their favorite format—the parallel column:

The great feat of the amateur literary detective is to run up parallel columns, and this he can accomplish with the agility of an acrobat. When first invented, the setting of parallel passages side by side was a most ingenious device, deadly to an imposter or to a thief caught in the very act of literary larceny. But these parallel passages must be prepared with exceeding care, and with the utmost certainty. Unless the matter on the one side exactly balance the matter on the other side, like the packs on a donkey’s back, the burden is likely

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34. Mathews, “The Ethics of Plagiarism,” 25. Mathews writes: “In his delightful paper on Gray, Mr. Lowell declares that ‘we do not ask where people got their hints, but what they made out of them.’ Mr. Lowell, I doubt me, is speaking for himself alone, and for the few others who attempt the higher criticism with adequate insight, breadth, and equipment. Only too many of the minor critics have no time to ask what an author has done, they are so busy in asking where he may have got his hints. Thus it is that the air is full of accusations of plagiarism, and the bringing of these accusations is a disease which bids fair to become epidemic in literary journalism. Perhaps this is a sign, or at least a symptom, of the intellectual decadence of our race which these same critics sometimes venture to announce.” The reference is to James Russell Lowell’s essay, *Gray*, published in 1886.

35. James Russell Lowell, *The Writings of James Russell Lowell: Latest Literary Essays and Addresses* (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1891), 41.

to fall about the donkey's feet, and he may chance to break his neck. Parallel columns should be most sparingly used, and only in cases of absolute necessity. As they are employed now only too often, they are quite inconclusive; and it has been neatly remarked that they are perhaps like parallel lines, in that they would never meet, however far produced.<sup>36</sup>

Goethe's statement that I quoted earlier influenced George Eliot,<sup>37</sup> who had acquired a copy of his book, and expanded on the metaphor of eating an animal used by Goethe in her essay "Looking Backward," published in *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* in 1879. McFarlane describes it as follows:

Theophrastus reflects on the origin and ownership of the "slice of excellent ham" upon which he once breakfasted. It belongs first and foremost, Theophrastus is prepared to admit, to the "small squealing black pig" from whose haunch it was carved. If one endeavors to determine provenance beyond that point, however, "one enters on a fearful labyrinth in tracing compound interest backward, and such complications of thought [reduce] the flavor of the ham." When read within the wider context of *Impressions*, a book preoccupied with questions of both intellectual property and intellectual propriety, it is clear that Theophrastus' meditation on the pig is a discreet parable . . . for the pointlessness of trying to ascribe ownership to literary works. The calculation of literary-intellectual debt Theophrastus suggests to be not only futile, but also disadvantageous: the actuarial effort involved will result in an impair-

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36. Matthews, "The Ethics of Plagiarism," 27–28.

37. George Eliot was the pen name of author Mary Anne Evans (1819–1880).



ment of the pleasure (the flavour of the ham) derived from the literary work itself (the black pig).<sup>38</sup>

In more recent times, J. K. Rowling, in a radio interview said, “The question you are most frequently asked as an author is: ‘Where do you get your ideas from?’ I find it very frustrating because, speaking personally, I haven’t got the faintest idea where my ideas come from, or how my imagination works. I’m just grateful that it does, because it gives me more entertainment than it gives anyone else.”<sup>39</sup> Rowling has endured her fair share of investigation by these literary detectives, although perhaps in her case, the motivation wasn’t malice but money.

In July 2011, a plagiarism suit against Rowling was dismissed:

The move marks the end of a bitterly fought battle in which Rowling was accused of having lifted the plot of the fourth book in the series—Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire—from Jacobs’s book, Willy the Wizard.

She and her publisher, Bloomsbury, had faced a demand for more than \$1bn (£659m) in damages. . . . “As the judge noted, those behind the claim set about publicising the case with a view to exerting pressure and promoting their ‘book’. Quite how they ever thought that we would succumb to pressure indicates a complete lack of understanding on their part. We are glad that the substantive action is now at an end.” . . . The same claim had already been comprehensively rejected

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38. MacFarlane, *Original Copy*, 92. MacFarlane references Eliot, George, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, ed. Nancy Henry (London: William Pickering, 1994), 18. See also 27 in the original edition (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1879).

39. J. K. Rowling, “From Mr Darcy to Harry Potter by way of Lolita,” *Sunday Herald* (21 May 2000), <http://www.accio-quote.org/articles/2000/0500-herald-sun-rowling.html>.

in the US, where a judge in the Manhattan-based US district court for the southern district of New York said that “the contrast between the total concept and feel of the works is so stark that any serious comparison of the two strains credulity.”<sup>40</sup>

Grunder, in his *Mormon Parallels* (2008) uses the word *originality* twice. The first is particularly important to this discussion:

We may cherish Joseph’s words. We can preach them from our pulpits. We resound them in our hymns. What we must not proclaim is their requisite exclusivity. Believe what you believe, simple and pure; a chaste and humble faith thrives upon its own merits. But oblige your beliefs with careless claims of indispensable originality; crown your beliefs with exaggerated novelty; or hang them upon inexact science and undisciplined selective history, and the walls may come crashing down. (2008, p. 16)

On the one hand, Grunder is right about hanging belief on a notion of indispensable originality. On the other hand, Grunder

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40. Press Association, “Harry Potter Plagiarism Claim Struck Out,” *The Guardian*, 8 July 2010. See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/jul/18/harry-potter-plagiarism-struck-out#history-link-box>. What was the basis for the claim? A press release issued by the plaintiffs stated that “both books tell the tale of a Wizard who discovers his true nature whilst a boy. Later, he partakes in an International Wizards Contest. In each book, the Wizard can only discover his central task in a special bathroom: to rescue artificially held hostages, from half-human creatures, acting as Contest agents, to earn points and win the Contest. In *Willy The Wizard*, a short, densely written, beautifully illustrated book, Jacobs created a fantasy world intertwined with the real world in which there are Wizard Schools, Wizard Brewing Villages, Wizard Chess, Wizard Trains, Wizard Hospitals, Wizard Travel by magic powder, Elves as Wizard Helpers, International Gatherings of Wizards etc. All of these Jacobs’ concepts are echoed in Harry Potter. The Estate maintains that Jacobs’ agent was Christopher Little, the same literary agent who years later ‘discovered’ J.K. Rowling. Little now oversees the Harry Potter brand worldwide.” Rowling faced similar claims in 2002.

isn't really looking for originality. This distinction was discussed after the early complaints of abuse by parallels. Fernand Baldensperger, an influential leader in French Comparatism, published an attack on *Stoffgeschichte* (the study of subject matter) in 1921, in the first issue of the *Revue de Littérature Comparée*: "In ridding Comparative Literature of thematology, the hunt and the craze for sources, the 'small pleasure of searching for sources, not in order to extrapolate originality, but in order to reduce initiative and denounce plagiarism,'" and then it is reported that "Baldensperger made room for what he regarded as more relevant approaches and methods within the budding discipline." His own preference was for what he called genetics or artistic morphology.<sup>41</sup>

By the end of the 19th century, we find many discussions of the problems of using parallels as a way of investigating texts and authors. And within a few decades (in the early parts of the 20th century), the use of parallels to demonstrate relationships between texts and authors had taken a distant back seat. Most of the discussion from this period deals with ways to rehabilitate the process—first through a recognition of the problems encountered in using parallels, and then via a series of presentations on how to deal with those flaws.

### Comparison of Comparisons<sup>42</sup>

The earliest arguments put forward dealt with empirical errors—those that could be easily detected and explained.

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41. Ulrich Weisstein, *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory*, trans. William Riggan (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), 178. Weisstein references "Littérature comparée: Le mot et la chose," *Revue de littérature comparée* 1 (1921): 1–29, see especially 6, 10.

42. I am using this notion as a way of critiquing both the comparative process in which Grunder engages specifically, and the process more generally. I argue that *a* is like *b* in the same sense that *c* is like *d*, or in other words, the same situations that give rise to various works of comparison also generally seem to apply to Grunder's comparisons. Along these same lines, the idea of comparison of texts in this way, and the actual comparisons themselves, have a

Edward A. Freeman, in his *Methods of Historical Study* made this observation:

I have often thought how easily two important reigns in our own history might be dealt with in the way that I have spoken of, how easily the later reign might be judged to be a mere repetition of the former, if we knew no more of them than we know of some other parts of history. Let us suppose that the reigns of Henry the First and Henry the Second were known to us only in the same meagre way that we know the reigns of some of the ancient potentates of the East. In short and dry annals they might easily be told so as to look like the same story. Each king bears the same name; each reigns the same number of years; each comes to the crown in a way other than succession from father to son; each restores order after a time of confusion; each improves his political position by his marriage; each is hailed as a restorer of the old native kingship; each loses his eldest son; each gives his daughter Matilda to a Henry in Germany; each has a controversy with his archbishop; each wages war with France; each dies in his continental dominions; each, if our supposed meagre annals can be supposed to tell us of such points, shows himself a great lawgiver and administrator, and each, to some extent, displays the same personal qualities, good and bad. Now when we come really to study

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history and a literature of their own. As Hanges tells us: "In comments specifically devoted to pedagogy, Smith reminds us that students need to be exposed to comparisons; nothing must stand alone,... comparison opens up space for criticism. . . . I am convinced that we can use such examples comparatively to meet Smith's pedagogical goal, not just in terms of comparing religious objects, but as a means of critiquing the act of comparison itself." James Constantine Hanges, "Interpreting Glossolalia and the Comparison of Comparisons," in *Comparing Religions Possibilities and Perils?* ed. Thomas Athanasius Idinopulos, Brian C. Wilson, and James Constantine Hanges (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 181.

the two reigns, we see that the details of all these supposed points of likeness are utterly different; but I am supposing very meagre annals, such as very often are all that we can get, and, in such annals, the two tales would very likely be so told that a master of higher criticism might cast aside Henry the Second and his acts as a mere double of his grandfather and his acts. We know how very far wrong such a judgment would be; and this should make us be cautious in applying a rule which, though often very useful, is always dangerous in cases where we may get utterly wrong without knowing it.<sup>43</sup>

Freeman was dealing with the issue of parallels specifically as it affects the reading and writing of history. In reading fiction, we often presuppose that the events are generally made up—creations of imagination. In the modern era we often see this explicitly formulated.<sup>44</sup> Documents claiming some sense of historiography are more ambiguous, and parallels made between them are problematic. In this context, Freeman highlighted two particular issues. The first is that parallels can occur between similar but verifiably different events. Although in Freeman's example, the events are related (and the relationship helps to explain some but not all of the similarities), this model could be extended to any two sets of otherwise unrelated events. The second issue involves the notion of redefining relevant material in more simplistic language. The two very different events, if reduced to the same general terms sound similar enough that the higher critic

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43. Edward A. Freeman, *The Methods of Historical Study* (London: Macmillan, 1886), 138–39.

44. The use of a standard disclaimer indicating that “the characters and events presented in this film [or photoplay] are fictitious” became a fixture following the libel suit over MGM's movie *Rasputin and the Empress* in 1932. John T. Aquino, *Truth and Lives on Film: The Legal Problems of Depicting Real Persons and Events in a Fictional Medium* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), 25.

could assume that they represented the same original event. The risk, as Freeman demonstrates, is that in such cases, the analysis would not only be wrong, but that there might also be no real way of identifying or correcting the error. Historians use texts, but those in other disciplines such as literary and religious studies are also dependent on them. Their responses to these issues were much more specific.

In 1899, in his *A Biblical Introduction*, W. H. Bennett argued that “as the treatment of the argument from literary parallels is very difficult, and needs much discrimination, it may be as well to say a few words on the subject, in order to show what is the point at issue.”<sup>45</sup> He then provided five reasons that make arguments from parallels “irrelevant.” Three of these are of particular interest:

(ii.) Many alleged parallels are entirely irrelevant, and are only such as must naturally exist between works in the same language, by authors of the same race, acquainted with the history and literature, customs and traditions which were earlier than both of them. . . .

(iii.) In considering two similar passages, A and B, there are at least three possible explanations of their resemblance. A may be dependent on B, or B on A, or both A and B may be dependent on something prior to both of them. A critic with a theory—and everybody starts with a prepossession in favour of some theory—is tempted to take for granted that the relation of the parallel passages is in accordance with his theory. If he holds that B is older than A, it seems to him that A is so obviously dependent on B, that this dependence proves the early date of B. But, as a rule, it is very difficult to determine which of two similar passages is dependent

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45. W. H. Bennett and Walter F. Adeney, *A Biblical Introduction* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1899), 39.

on the other. Often the question can only be settled by our *knowledge* that one passage is taken from an earlier work than the other; and where we do not possess such knowledge the priority is quite uncertain, and a comparison of the passages yields little or no evidence as to the date of the documents in which they occur. . . .

(v.) Where a work is known to be composite, a literary parallel to one section affords no direct evidence of the date of the other sections.<sup>46</sup>

Bennett was not the first to raise these, but he brought some attention to the issue. The beginning of the twentieth century marked what has been called a “crisis of literary studies.”<sup>47</sup> We can find dozens of additional critiques on the process of accumulating parallels that followed. I have included here brief mention of a few of the most influential. In 1929, for example, E. H. C. Oliphant commented on the topic in his essay titled “How Not to Play the Game of Parallels”:

It is time to take critical stock of what has been accomplished, to expose the absurdity of much that is being done in this field of scholarship, and to endeavor to estimate the value of the work that really counts.

His presentation was as follows:

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46. Bennett and Adeney, *Biblical Introduction*, 39.

47. “Given the 19th century’s general fondness for comparison as an intellectual exercise and the subsequent density of its articulations in the academic world, the chronologically late appearance of a Comparative Literature discipline is particularly significant—for it can be seen as a confirmation of the hypothesis that only the crisis of literary studies around 1900 triggered its emergence.” (Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, “The Origins of Literary Studies—And Their End?” *Stanford Humanities Review* 6/1 [1998]). <http://www.stanford.edu/group/SHR/6-1/html/gumbrecht.html>. Gumbrecht references David Palumbo-Liu, “Termos da (in)diferença: cosmopolitismo, política cultural e o futuro dos estudos da literatura,” *Cadernos da Pós / Letras* 14 (1995): 46–62.

First let it be remarked that passages are not to be considered parallels because they duplicate thought without any duplication of language. Ideas may be common to many writers, and nothing is to be inferred from such similarity. Verbal parallels that do not duplicate ideas may also be ignored. The parallelism in such cases may be regarded as merely accidental. The only true parallel is one that duplicates both thought and the expression of thought. If we accept that interpretation, we shall knock out about seventy percent of what are presented as parallels.

Regarding everything that is offered to us as a parallel, we have to inquire not only whether or not it fulfils this condition, but also, if it does, whether it possesses any significance. It is possible to have a duplication of both language and thought, and yet for the thought to be so trite as to make it ridiculous to attach any importance to its repetition. And, even if the suggested parallel passes that test, we have yet to ask ourselves whether or not it cannot be paralleled in the work of some other writer than the one to whom it is desired to attribute both passages.<sup>48</sup>

As with many others writing in the early 20th century on the subject of literary parallels, Oliphant's intention wasn't merely to discredit the practice (although he represents a body of literature that effectively did just that), but to rehabilitate the practice. From his perspective, the vast majority of parallels that were being published were absurd—and here he provides an early discussion of a methodology designed to narrow down the scope of parallelisms to those that “possesses any significance.”

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48. Ernest Henry Clark Oliphant, “How Not to Play the Game of Parallels,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 28/1 (January 1929): 1.



Oliphant, coming from a different discipline than Bennett, highlights two additional aspects of the criticism of parallels. The first is the question of what constituted a relevant parallel or a “true parallel.” That is, how should one gauge significance of the literary parallels we are presented with? The second related issue is the question of how to exclude alleged parallels that were proposed merely on the basis of a verbal overlap that was only to be expected from authors writing in the same language, from essentially the same time and place. Not long after Oliphant’s article was published, Muriel St. Clare Byrne tells us that while parallels abound, “It is very important, however, for every parallel-hunter to formulate and obey certain golden rules before he bases thereupon any deductions.” These rules were:

1. Parallels may be susceptible to at least three explanations: (a) unsuspected identity of authorship (b) plagiarism, either deliberate or unconscious (c) coincidence;
2. Quality is all-important, and parallels demand very careful grading—e.g., mere verbal parallelism is of almost no value in comparison with parallelism of thought coupled with some verbal parallelism;
3. Mere accumulation of ungraded parallels does not prove anything;
4. In accumulating parallels for the sake of cumulative effect we may logically proceed from the known to the collaborate, or from the known to the anonymous play, but not from the collaborate to the anonymous;
5. In order to express ourselves as certain of attributions we must prove exhaustively that we cannot parallel words, images, and phrases as a body from other acknowledged plays of the period; in other words, the negative check must always be applied.<sup>49</sup>

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49. Muriel St. Clair Byrne, “Bibliographical Clues in Collaborate Plays,” *The Library: A Quarterly Review of Bibliography* 13/1 (June 1932): 24.

Much more comprehensive strategies came later—as well as new approaches to the relationships between texts. Methodologies and criteria were fashioned that took a more critical look at parallels and their use. The corollary to new methods for evaluating parallels was the rejection of the previous collections. Harold Love tells us that “the mass of trivial and approximate resemblances accepted by an earlier generation of Elizabethan scholars have long been recognised as possessing little evidential value.”<sup>50</sup> How then do we explain these similarities? Literary theory began differentiating between these two issues—where material was used in a genetic fashion and where similarities were caused by common themes and elements within an environment, as well as the impact readers have on recognizing these similarities. These features have been described by the term “intertextuality.”

### Intertextuality

Intertextuality is the shaping of texts’ meanings by other texts. It can refer to an author’s borrowing and transformation of a prior text or to a reader’s referencing of one text in reading another.<sup>51</sup>

The word *intertextuality* was coined by Julia Kristeva in 1967. Kristeva was expanding on the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin. In her essay, “Word, Dialogue and Novel,” she presented us with the following: “Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *Intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double*.”<sup>52</sup> Perhaps a more

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50. Harold Love, *Attributing Authorship: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 89.

51. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intertextuality>.

52. Julia Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue and Novel,” in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. T. Moi (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 37.

understandable distinction can be found in Benjamin Sommer's *A Prophet Reads Scripture*:

One approach is oriented toward "influence" and "allusion," the other toward "intertextuality." Literary critics have long focused on the former approach, asking how one composition evokes its antecedents, how one author is affected by another, and what sources a text utilizes. That approach is diachronic, because it distinguishes between the earlier text (the source or the influence) and the later one (the alluding text or the influenced). It focuses attention on the author as well as on the text itself.

"Intertextuality" (as Clayton and Rothstein use the word) encompasses manifold connections between a text being studied and other texts, or between a text being studied and commonplace phrases or figures from the linguistic or cultural systems in which the text exists. As Ziv Ben-Porat explains, these connections do not arise exclusively from an intentional and signaled use of an earlier text, such as citation (which might be studied under the rubrics of influence or allusion). The connections may result from the way that expressions in a given text reflect linguistic, esthetic, cultural, or ideological contexts of the text at hand; other texts may share those contexts, and hence links among many texts may be noticed, whether the authors of the texts knew each other or not.<sup>53</sup>

Underneath the umbrella of intertextuality we find several kinds of connections between texts. Some of them do stem from what might be termed influence (and this influence can

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53. Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture* (Stanford, CT: Stanford University Press, 1998), 7.

range from very specific, where an author borrows, or quotes from a source, to very general, as when an author is influenced by an entire body of literature without seeming to use a specific source or text). Other connections can be explained as the result of shared milieus, shared subject matter, or even shared languages of origin. Some connections may be only understood when the texts are read by certain audiences, connections that did not exist for the original author of a text. Whatever the source(s) of these connections, they exist for all texts. Grunder seems to have this in mind (although he uses different terms) when he wrote:

We are scarcely dealing here with issues of pointed study or conscious borrowing. No single one of these writings was essential to the work of Joseph Smith, and this *Bibliographic Source* hangs upon no individual concept—upon no particular text. It is, rather, the very existence of the Mormon parallels which these sources display—in such great number, distribution, and uncanny resemblance to the literary, doctrinal and social structures which Joseph formed—which may command our attention. (2008, pp. 37–38).

In contrast to this point we have Ferguson's remarks that I presented earlier: "That Christians observed the same customs and used words in the same way as their contemporaries is hardly noteworthy in itself."<sup>54</sup> In other words, every religious movement that arises in a particular historic era, which has a real history with real individuals and real texts, will produce parallels "in such great number, distribution, and uncanny resemblance to the literary, doctrinal and social structures" with its environment. If we were to find a movement that had none of these features, which did not have such great numbers of

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54. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 2.

seeming “parallels,” we would have to start from the position that it wasn’t a real religion but was fictional, and that it must have come from some other time and place. Without these points of contact, such a religion would be completely inaccessible to its potential adherents. What is for Grunder “uncanny” is merely expected and commonplace for Ferguson.

Somer concludes: “Hence links among many texts may be noticed, whether the authors of the texts knew each other or not.” Grunder suggests, “It really does not matter whether Joseph Smith actually read any specific manuscript or book, because an entire culture is on display” (2008, p. 37). And yet, this isn’t a novel or noteworthy insight. We already recognize that the roots of Mormonism occur in a cultural setting—more than this, Mormonism isn’t a *result* of a cultural environment, it is a *part* of it, and its existence helps to shape and reshape that cultural setting. In this way, we must also ask (where Grunder does not) how many of his parallels are due purely to these cultural settings, as well as the more complicated question of how many of these parallels exist only because we (the present day readers) note these connections.

### Environmental versus Genetic Origins

Grunder tells us in his thesis statement that “most of the seeds of Joseph Smith’s texts and prophecies enjoyed popular cultural dissemination in forms familiar to non-Mormons before they grew into scripture of the latter day.” According to Kristeva, this is exactly what we should expect—and not just in Joseph Smith’s writings, or the collected works of Mormonism. This is true of any author, of the collected writings of any group, and it is just as true of Grunder’s literary efforts. If this is the extent of our consideration, then there is truly nothing original—not just with Joseph Smith, but with any author. Similarities can be found between any two texts. Identifying the kind of

intertextuality that exists between two texts becomes an important part of understanding their similarities.

Texts can be original (or perhaps even unique) in two different ways. We have an ontological level, where we see a text as a communicative act, with an author and an intended meaning. We also have a historical level in which a text occurs in a particular place and time—and becomes (as Kristeva put it) “a mosaic of quotations.” From Jonathon Z. Smith’s perspective on originality in religion, Grunder’s work (and others like it) represents an “illicit move from ontological to the historical that raises the question of the comparison of” texts. A text can be original—it can be an author’s own thoughts (as opposed to being the thoughts of someone else)—and still come about through a historical process that necessarily leaves behind similarities to many other texts.

To avoid this illicit move, we need to consider both of these two aspects independently—the meaning of a text (as a communicative act) as well as the historical context in which it was produced. Some texts show environmental similarities (they share language, ideologies, aesthetics, and cultural backgrounds). Other texts are related in a more direct fashion—they have a direct literary connection, or what I will refer to here as a *genetic* relationship. When these texts borrow from each other, whether that occurs as quotation, allusion, reinscription,<sup>55</sup> or some other use, there is textual reliance. In more general terms, I use *textual reliance* to describe what happens when one text occurs in the way it does because another text occurs in the way that it does. The idea of genetic origins implies a relationship

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55. In this context, *reinscription* refers to the re-appropriation or re-writing of a text. In doing this, past texts are given new meaning in a new context. For discussion see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 269–82. For additional discussion and some useful examples, see Felisa Vergara Reynolds: *Literary Cannibalism: Almost The Same, But Not Quite/ Almost The Same But Not White* (PhD diss. Cambridge: Harvard University, 2009).

that can be described—parent and child, or perhaps as ancestor and descendant. In these cases we can describe a relationship between texts that is much more definite than talking about environmental issues of which an author may or may not be aware.<sup>56</sup> Thus, textual reliance doesn't always mean unoriginality either:

During his mental crisis in 1896, Strindberg read the Swedish visionary [Swedenborg] (*On Heaven and Hell*, among others), and he refers explicitly to him in the book where he describes his crisis, *Inferno*. His own conception of hell is clearly and admittedly reminiscent of that of the older writer. Nevertheless, it seems as if the reading of Swedenborg did not add anything new to his views. Rather, the descriptions of Hell confirmed ideas with which he was long since familiar, e.g., from Schopenhauer (G. Brandell). In other words, he used what he was already prepared to find. In such a situation, how are we to determine Swedenborg's impact on his inferno theology?<sup>57</sup>

Discussions of this sort are beyond the scope of this essay, but it is necessary to be aware of these kinds of obstacles to any

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56. Although, see Bert Cozijnsen, "A Critical Contribution to the *Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti*: Jude and Hesiod", cited in note 3, above. Cozijnsen argues that this distinction is not descriptive enough, and suggests movements towards a discussion of intertextuality that offers a broader description. He also suggests that "the paradigm of 'analogy or genealogy' is liable to apologetic misuse. In his recent *Drudgery Divine* Smith has illustrated how 'from a standpoint of protecting the privileged position of early Christianity, it is only genealogical comparisons that are worthy of note, if only typically, insistently to be denied'." (See also Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 48.) As my present review deals with the entire gamut of parallels offered by Grunder, Cozijnsen's apprehension isn't warranted, and I generally stick to these larger categories to keep the discussion easier to follow. A somewhat more nuanced view is introduced in the section on Methodology.

57. Sven Linnér, "The Structure and Functions of Literary Comparisons," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 26/2 (1967): 178.

simple differentiation. Finally, when we compare a text to its environment, there is a sense that we are looking at the text as a product of that environment as opposed to the text being a part of that environment: “The problems associated with hunting for parallels are accentuated when we speak of someone, say Paul, and his ‘background.’ The next step is then to think of Paul as [merely] taking things from his ‘background’ and adapting them to his own circumstances and purposes. It is potentially fruitful, and certainly more realistic, to place Paul in the context of these discussions.”<sup>58</sup>

When we say that Mormonism shares features with the restorationist movement, it isn’t because Mormonism borrows from such a movement. Rather, Mormonism was a part of that movement—and we should understand the movement at least in part in terms of Mormonism (which remains perhaps its most successful contributor). In this sense, we have to be careful when we talk about the backgrounds of Mormonism within *Mormon Parallels*. White and Fitzgerald continue with this comment (that is also relevant to the discussion of *Mormon Parallels* here): “Thus, parallels alone are not enough. . . . There is a need for more nuanced treatment of social-historical as well as archaeological-cultural data in order to provide contextual grounding and correlation for the parallels. We need to discover both the social realities and the cultural understanding of their day.”<sup>59</sup>

### Comparison Revisited

The structure of the literary comparisons is, fundamentally, very simple. It can be described thus: the

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58. Abraham J. Malherbe, “Hellenistic Moralists and the New Testament,” in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters*, ed. E. J. Epp and G. W. Macrae (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 299, as quoted in White and Fitzgerald, “*Quod est comparandum*,” 38.

59. White and Fitzgerald, “*Quod est comparandum*,” 38.



critic lays the two texts he wishes to compare before his reader, points to them, and expects the reader to exclaim: "How striking, how similar!"<sup>60</sup>

For Grunder the lines between environmental and genetic parallels are blurred. After all, without a movement from historical to ontological, environmental influence really doesn't help deal with questions of originality. For Grunder there isn't a need to specify whether or not a certain parallel is environmental or genetic. For his purposes, the fact that a seeming parallel exists is evidence enough to support his thesis. The question of its significance is pushed into the background. Anthony J. Blasi asks what the purposes for our comparison are. But Blasi insists that "the guidelines that one should draw up for oneself should depend on those purposes."<sup>61</sup> In addition, "To pose the question of such purposes in any meaningful way, it is necessary to describe comparison itself in the most elementary manner possible. As an operation, comparison utilizes two kinds of concept—inclusive and exclusive. The inclusive concept enables two or more cases to be accepted as examples of what the concept includes. The inclusive concept prevents our comparing 'apples and oranges.' Thus the question arises in the comparative study of religion whether Buddhism and theistic religions can be compared; some concept broad enough to include both needs to come into play before any true comparison can be made. The exclusive concept distinguishes between the two or more cases that are being compared. They cannot be identical; otherwise no comparison is in order. These two concepts are not mutually exclusive because a comparison entails both a sameness and a difference. The difference is all the more informative since it characterizes the two (or more) cases in

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60. Linnér, "Structure and Functions of Literary Comparisons," 169.

61. Anthony J. Blasi, "Comparison as a Theoretical Exercise," in *Comparing Religions: Possibilities and Perils?* ed. Idinopulos et al., 19.

differing ways; the two cases are not merely two phenomena that would be similar in all respects save not being identical. That is to say, the difference is not simply that between singularity and plurality.”<sup>62</sup>

When I present a more formal methodology in the next section, my purpose is to reinforce the boundary between ontological and historical meanings for these texts by offering categories for the parallels that Grunder has provided us. I will sort into three distinct groups: those that appear to be genetic in nature, those that seem to be environmental, and those that do not seem to be parallels at all (this last group being the “apples and oranges” of the mix). Where we have genetic relationships, I hope to be able to describe more closely the possible natures of these relationships. This will allow us to see what cannot be original, and what might be original, and in doing so, we can use a language of both similarity and difference to investigate our texts.

### A Note on Coincidence and Randomness

As a final note, there needs to be some basic discussion of the idea of coincidence. One of the issues that very frequently crops up in a discussion of parallels is how likely or unlikely the parallels are that have been found (particularly when we find them together in a group). Bruce G. Schaalje made this observation:

One of the messages that I hope my Intro Stats students remember after the semester is that *apparently-weird stuff happens*. The classic example is of a guy, call him Bob, who won a million dollar lottery twice in a seven year period. The probability seems way small. The probability of winning once is 1 in 13 million, so the probability of winning twice would seem

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62. Blasi, “Comparison as a Theoretical Exercise,” 19.

to be 1/13M squared, or about 1 in half a quintillion. That just couldn't happen, so Bob must be a cheater. However, this calculation is misleading. The question is not about *Bob* winning the lottery twice in a seven-year period, it's about *someone, somewhere* winning a million-dollar lottery twice in seven years. Bob wasn't identified *before* he started playing the lottery, and then followed up. He was identified *after* the thing happened. It turns out that, given all the people who repeatedly buy lottery tickets, the probability of someone-somewhere winning the lottery twice in a seven year period is over 90%.<sup>63</sup>

This, as Schaalje insists, is “the crux of parallelomania.” You look for any parallels between two texts, and when you find them (perhaps several of them), “you act (mistakenly, not maliciously) as if you had that exact coincidence in mind before you started looking. The real probability that . . . you would find a bunch is actually very high.”<sup>64</sup> In this case, what may seem highly suspect or too coincidental to be believable as random chance is really quite believable. Where we are dealing with environmental influence on a text in its historical process, any two texts can display large quantities of similarities found through comparison. But, a mountain of these parallels (while seemingly too large to be mere coincidence) isn't evidence of a more genetic relationship. As one of the “five golden rules” I provided earlier points out: “Mere accumulation of ungraded parallels does not prove anything.”

In one instance Grunder does bring up the issue of potential coincidence. It comes in his discussion of Carsten Niebuhr's *Travels Through Arabia*. He notes that:

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63. G. Bruce Schaalje, [http://www.mormondialogue.org/topic/51164-more-book-of-mormon-studies/page\\_\\_p\\_\\_1208922271#entry1208922271](http://www.mormondialogue.org/topic/51164-more-book-of-mormon-studies/page__p__1208922271#entry1208922271).

64. Schaalje, 1/12/2011.

some Book of Mormon Defenders place heavy emphasis upon a very old tribal area near Sana (in Yemen, in the southwestern portion of the Arabian peninsula), identified with the consonants, “NHM,” thus called “Nehhm,” “Nehem,” “Nihm,” “Nahm,” or similar variants. Those scholars propose that location for a site which is mentioned in the Book of Mormon portion which occurs in Arabia: “And it came to pass that Ishmael died, and was buried in the place which was called Nahom” (1 Nephi 16:34).

Ultimately, Grunder’s explanation for this parallel is that it represents random chance:

Certainly, we will not turn away from the obvious Book of Mormon defense point that the word “Nahom” is not merely compatible with known ancient sounds: it also corresponds geographically to a likely ancient counterpart in the Book of Mormon story. But how many hundred other locations existed along any proposed Lehi route through Arabia, for which Joseph Smith might have happened to come up with the same three consonants in order, instead of this particular example? And in the entire Book of Mormon saga of a thousand years and more—through two hemispheres—is it not fair that Joseph Smith should get one place name right—at least its consonants? (2008, pp. 1052–54).

Apparently, coincidence is a useful notion only when it is applied to the parallels presented by the defenders of Moromonism, and even then, Grunder downplays the full strength of the apologetic argument.<sup>65</sup>

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65. While Grunder concedes that the name is similar, and that the location is appropriate, he ignores the further linguistic and rhetorical linkages that can be found in the textual narrative. The Nahom similarity is perhaps one of the most frequently discussed parallels in Mormon studies, and has been identified

## Some Comments on Ideology

I have already commented to some extent on the nature of Grunder's work as a polemical argument. This plays out in other more obvious ways. Many of Grunder's parallels are not original to this *Bibliography*, and when these are mentioned, there is often just a reference to earlier literature.<sup>66</sup> In some instances, where these parallels have been responded to in some fashion, Grunder discusses the responses. In parallel 26 (*Antimasonic State Convention of Ohio, Canton, 1830*), for example, he tells us on the subject of the phrase *secret combinations*: "A few articles thrown at this topic by Mormon defenders in recent years serve primarily as models of what not to do when attempting ad-hoc historiography" (2008, p. 130).

I deal with his response in a more detailed fashion in the section on method. But, the invective he displays for what he

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as one of the better arguments raised for the historicity of the Book of Mormon. Rather than deal with the range of issues that have been raised, Grunder instead reduces them to these two points—and in doing so he conceals the issues that Mormon defenders have identified. For those arguments see Warren P. Aston and Michaela Knoth Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi: New Evidence for Lehi's Journey across Arabia to Bountiful* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994); Warren P. Aston, "Newly Found Altars from Nahom," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10/2 (2001): 56–61; S. Kent Brown, "'The Place Which Was Called Nahom': New Light from Ancient Yemen," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 66–68; Alan Goff, "Mourning, Consolation, and Repentance at Nahom," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 92–99; Noel B. Reynolds, "Lehi's Arabian Journey Updated," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel Reynolds (Provo: FARMS, 1997), 379–89; and Eugene England, "Through the Arabian Desert to a Bountiful Land: Could Joseph Smith Have Known the Way?" in *Book of Mormon Authorship*, ed. by Noel B. Reynolds (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982, repr. Provo: UT, FARMS, 1996), 143–56.

66. For example, in his first parallel, rather than quoting from the source, Grunder writes: "Adair was important in the propagation of Hebrew Indian origin theories which were later reflected, by whatever means, in the Book of Mormon. See Vogel 1986, 18, 41–42, 54, 57, 64–65, 105; Brodie, 45 n.; Bushman 1984, 134" (2008, p. 57). Grunder references dozens of other polemical works detailing parallels.

terms defenders of Mormonism comes through. In some cases, it causes the selection of parallels. For example, in Parallel 55, Grunder provides us with a source identified as: “BIBLE. New Testament. Apocryphal books. Gospel of Nicodemus. German. 1819; BIBLE. Old Testament. Apocryphal books. Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs. German. 1819.” Grunder introduces the text in this way:

Includes *the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, noted for its reference to multiple heavens. In *Christ’s Eternal Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), O. Preston and Christine H. Robinson refer to this *Testament*, noting that “Levi describes three heavens, or degrees of glory, that will exist in the hereafter to segregate the righteous from the unrighteous.” p. 168. The Robinsons chose a Medieval recension of this source, which corresponded to Paul’s third heaven (and Mormon doctrine). In reality, the text speaks of *seven* heavens, which are mentioned in the German edition considered here, p. 123. (2008, p. 243)

These comments are fascinating. Grunder has apparently included this text as a way of responding to the Robinsons’ earlier assertions about Mormonism’s teachings. Grunder notes that the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* is significant because it refers to multiple heavens. Of course, so does the Apostle Paul in the New Testament (which is also contained in this source, but which Grunder doesn’t emphasize). In taking this jab at what is at least in part an apologetic text, Grunder makes a significant error. It is widely accepted in Biblical scholarship that the Testament of Levi in its original form had three, not seven heavens.<sup>67</sup>

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67. The vision originally included three heavens, although in some forms of the text (α) 3:1–8 has been modified and expanded in order to depict seven heavens. Cf. 2 Corinthians 12:2 where Paul ascends in a vision to the “third

So we have multiple versions of this text, some with an original three-heaven cosmology, some with seven. Grunder's source contains the version with seven in its copy of the Testament of Levi. Engaging modern scholarship, as Grunder does, using such a source is problematic—and it demonstrates that Grunder is using his parallel as a response. Perhaps this is no different from the *ad hoc* historiography of which he accuses others. For Joseph Smith, the notion of three heavens was clearly connected to Paul (and not to some other source)—and Joseph reworked 1 Corinthians 15:40 in his emendations to the New Testament to reflect this perspective: “Also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial, and bodies telestial; but the glory of the celestial, one; and the terrestrial, another; and the telestial, another.”<sup>68</sup>

Given this, the application of the Testament of Levi to the question of Mormonism's view of multiple heavens is problematic. Earlier in his introduction, Grunder gives us this bit of warning with regard to apologetic authors: “The problem with such presentations is that their authors generally misunderstand the chronologically and geographically closer, much more forthright setting in which Joseph Smith actually thrived. In order for their arguments to work, these defenders have to neglect or underestimate the modern, proximate context to a regrettable degree, often with over-confident disregard of the world in which Mormonism emerged” (2008, p. 24).

The obvious and near source of the New Testament for a theology involving three heavens is ignored in favor of this tradition that was probably unfamiliar to Joseph Smith (certainly

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heaven,” H. C. Kee, “Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 788, n.2d. For a more detailed discussion of this idea along with references to the supporting literature see Adela Yarbro Collins, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Jewish and Christian Apocalypticism*, [JS] Sup 50 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 25–30. For an opposing (minority) view see J. E. Wright, *The Early History of Heaven* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 143–48.

68. Joseph Smith Translation of 1 Corinthians 15:40.

not as familiar as the New Testament). The source's inclusion in this bibliographic source seems to be more of a polemic against a perceived LDS apologetic than a serious consideration of this source as representing an environmental influence on the idea of three heavens in Mormon theology. In this case, the polemical argument itself comes with disregard to the closer source. And of course, in this particular instance, Grunder is simply wrong. In his introduction, Grunder tells us that

our seemingly irreconcilable, opposing stances which divide Mormon studies must render this simplistic summarizing problem in historiography even more serious among Saints. Extreme divergence encourages deliberate neglect of any sources which appear to be unfriendly. There is very little middle ground, but considerable effort to distract readers away from alternative views. Utter disdain for scholars—as human beings—who express contrary understanding is neither regretted, it seems, nor even convincingly camouflaged. (2008, p. 20)

When Grunder encounters publications that clash with his views, he simply attacks them. On the one side he declares, as discussed above, that the defenders' point of view is the perfect example of how not to proceed. The work they are critical of is described as "the best informed analysis of Joseph Smith ever written" (2008, p. 130–31, n.66). Grunder has positioned himself on one side of this division in Mormon studies, and despite what I view as his attempts to camouflage his point of view, it is hard to see in these kinds of remarks anything but "utter disdain." Ironically, he commits the very errors for which he castigates the "apologists."

In another example, we have for Mormon Parallels 4, 5, and 6, three maps of Africa. Grunder introduces the first map in this way:



Although this is a small map for such a vast region, with relatively few place names designated, the engraver has identified “Comoro,” a chain of French-owned volcanic islands (the Archipel des Comores) northwest of Madagascar, located on the map near the intersection of the lines for 50 degrees east and 10 degrees south. (2008, pp. 62–63)

The parallel (which isn’t actually stated here<sup>69</sup>) is between the name “Comoro” and the name of the hill “Cumorah.” While I discuss the idea of using single words as a possible parallels in my presentation of an appropriate method in the second section of this essay, this parallel in particular is useful in a discussion on ideology because of its curious history. In connection with this parallel, Grunder tells us that

these islands were a stopping place for Captain Kidd, who figured prominently in the treasure-hunting lore of Joseph Smith’s world. I notice, with some reservations, an interesting treatment of this subject by Dr. Ronald V. Huggins, “From Captain Kidd’s Treasure Ghost to the Angel Moroni: Changing Dramatis Personae in Early Mormonism,” in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 36:4 (Winter 2003), 17–42. (2008, p. 63).

The purpose of this passage seems clear: Grunder isn’t interested merely in placing the name Comoro into Joseph’s environment, he wants to provide some reason for Joseph being interested in this particular kind of source. It is not just an item on one map, as we see from the inclusion of Parallels 5 and 6, but effectively all maps that include the Comoro islands. And

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69. This is a good example of Linner’s comments previously quoted: “The structure of the literary comparisons is, fundamentally, very simple. It can be described thus: the critic lays the two texts he wishes to compare before his reader, points to them, and expects the reader to exclaim: ‘How striking, how similar!’” (Linnér, “The Structure and Functions of Literary Comparisons,” 169).

so he introduces us to Captain Kidd, and the legends about Captain Kidd that he thinks were circulating in Joseph's environment.<sup>70</sup> As far as I can tell, the first suggestion of this "parallel" can be found in a short article written by Fred Buchanan in *Sunstone* in 1989. Buchanan's proposal apparently had its roots in the Hofmann forgeries,<sup>71</sup> and was extended with the suggestion that the capitol city of the Comoro Islands was a city named Moroni. Grunder is aware of the arguments raised in that article (he quotes Buchanan extensively in 2008, pp. 866–867.) What Grunder doesn't quote or mention is the connection between the Comoros Islands and Captain Kidd that Buchanan raises:

A person I had been corresponding with . . . had written and mentioned that the famous buccaneer "Captain" William Kidd, who is reputed to have hidden gold and treasure at Gardener's Island, New York, and in a variety of new England locations, actually visited the Comoro Islands during his voyage to East Africa. . . . Ultimately I found that Kidd actually spent a considerable amount of time in the vicinity of the Comoros between March and August 1697, and that the islands were an important stopping-off point on the long voy-

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70. Grunder also raises this contention on p. 1459.

71. "During the Mark Hofmann salamander letter episode I became interested in the origins of Mormon names again. . . . I traced down some recent research on the history of the Comoro Islands and learned that the names 'Moroni' and 'Comoro' are both derived from the local Comoron dialect and mean, as far as I can determine, 'in the place of the fire.' The islands have one of the world's largest active volcanoes. Given the excitement over the salamander letter, I began to wonder if there were some connection between the Moroni in the Comoros and the word 'Moron,'" Frederick S. Buchanan, "Perilous Ponderings" (column, "Turning Time Over to . . ."), *Sunstone* (June 1989), 7–8. It is interesting to note that the Salamander letter seems to have been influential for Grunder as well—as he notes in his introduction, "Years after I saw my salamander." He discusses the event and his own response to the Hoffman affair in 2008, pp. 35–38.

age from New York to India. In fact, New York was a major source of supplies for pirates in business in the Indian Ocean. Captain Kidd, buried treasure, Comoro and Moroni—Joseph Smith, treasure hunting, gold plates, Cumorah and Moroni? Is all this coincidence or is there a connection between the activities of a Scottish buccaneer in the Indian Ocean in the late seventeenth century and the development of a prophet in upper New York in the early nineteenth century? Did Joseph Smith have access to accounts of Captain Kidd's exploits, which became more and more elaborate in the years following his hanging in London in 1701? Did accounts of Kidd's rendezvous at Comoro and Moroni color the folklore about Kidd's buried treasure to which young Joseph may have been exposed?<sup>72</sup>

From this starting point we get the much later Huggins' article mentioned by Grunder (along with his expressed but unde-tailed reservations). However, as pointed out by Mark Ashurst-McGee, the very few connections that have been claimed between early Mormons and Captain Kidd do not come from Mormon sources, and are quite late.<sup>73</sup> Additionally the capitol city Moroni has not yet been found on any early map showing the Comoro Islands. Grunder notes in his discussion of the first map that "the Encyclopædia Britannica records volcanic eruptions beginning in 1830 on the island of Great Comoro (Grande Comore) where Maroni, the capitol of this territory (not shown on the map discussed here or on other period maps which I have examined), is located (Encyclopædia Britannica eleventh

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72. Buchanan, "Perilous Ponderings," 7–9.

73. Huggins's abuse of historical sources and problematic conclusions are addressed in Mark Ashurst-McGee, "Moroni: Angel or Treasure Guardian?" *Mormon Historical Studies* 2/2 (2001): 39–75; see also *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): 34–100, at <http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/review/?vol=18&num=1&id=600>.

ed., 6:794–95, ‘Comoro Islands’” (2008, p. 63). More recently, Mike Reed located an eighteenth century map of Anjouan, one of the Comoro islands, with an indicated anchorage identified as Meroni. Although this is adjacent to an entirely different island than the one with the city Moroni, it does demonstrate that if all we are concerned with is identifying homonyms, eventually we will find what we are looking for.<sup>74</sup>

The interesting corollary is that while we find this rather small location indicated on this map, the present day capitol of Comoro, Moroni, has yet to be found on any maps contemporary with the publication of the Book of Mormon, and while this isn’t a guarantee that it won’t be found (it wouldn’t surprise me if it were), it does indicate that its importance was far less than it is today. In this way, these “parallels” are caused because we are expecting to find them—they are sought by a modern reader who has a different set of expectations than any contemporary reader would have, and the heightened importance attached to these names is caused by (and not the cause of) later rumors about Joseph Smith, including the texts forged by Mark Hofmann.

The point of bringing out these facts is to show that without the underlying (but as yet undemonstrated) narrative, there is no reason to actually connect the Comoro Islands with the Cumorah in the Book of Mormon. Homonyms, by themselves, cannot themselves tell us anything about two texts in comparison (or even two traditions in comparison). The character who runs into a bar to get a drink shares nothing with the character who runs into a bar and falls over with a concussion. Yes, both contain the same word—bar. But in both cases, the word is a very different word—they are actually unrelated. Perhaps those who share these expectations, rooted in the Hoffman forgeries expect that the relationship will be borne out upon further

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74. The map is by Jacques Nicolas Bellin, dated to 1748, and can be found at <http://alabamamaps.ua.edu/historicalmaps/africa/central-south.html>.

discoveries. But, in such a situation, the expectation is not one of any sort of environmental parallels but of a specific genetic connections. The names in the Book of Mormon occur (as the argument goes) precisely because of Captain Kidd's travels to the Comoro Islands and the city of Moroni that can be found there.

Adding to this, among all three maps, Grunder finds no other points of comparison between these maps and the Book of Mormon (which is somewhat surprising, given that the first map contains other names that are similar or identical to other names used in the Book of Mormon [e.g., Angola]). The narrow focus is not on finding similar words as much as it is on supporting the pre-existing theory.

The longer the critic's road from the texts he wishes to compare to the actual point of confrontation, the greater the un-certainty of his results. For we must ask ourselves: how faithful is his translation to the original, and how much of their meaning have the thoughts extracted lost by being taken out of their context? Everyone realizes that questions like these have to be asked, and that they are hard to answer.<sup>75</sup>

These kinds of entries are not included by Grunder to try and explicate the environment from which early Mormon discussions developed. Rather they are heavily vested in much more recent debates between Mormonism's critics and its defenders.

*Benjamin L. McGuire is a technologist in the field of healthcare in northern Michigan, where he lives with his wife and three children. He has special interest in the field of literary theory and its application to the Book of Mormon and early LDS literature. He has previously published with the Maxwell Institute.*

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75. Linnér, "Structure and Functions of Literary Comparisons," 172.





