

# INTERPRETER

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A JOURNAL OF MORMON SCRIPTURE

Volume 5 · 2013 · Pages 61-104

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

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Offprint Series

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# FINDING PARALLELS: SOME CAUTIONS AND CRITICISMS PART TWO

*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.*

## Part II: A Preliminary Methodology

The process of recognizing parallels—like Darwin discovering distinctive but similar species of finches on the various islands of the Gallapagos—is first and foremost the assembly of a data set on and from which new analysis will need to be based. On first sight, the similarities must evoke some appropriate theoretical explanation. But upon reflection and with the collection of each new data set, one will begin to evaluate and analyze not only the data but also the previous theories themselves. . . . The process of comparison in the light of new data sets must also cause us to reformulate—or as Smith puts it, to deconstruct and reconstruct—the theories themselves.<sup>1</sup>

Over the past two centuries, there have been many lists of rules offered on the process of presenting parallels. As often as not, these are discussions on what shouldn't be done as opposed to what should be. I referenced several of these in my introductory material (see Part I of this essay). Most of these deal with the idea of direct borrowing—of situations where there is a proposed genetic connection between two texts. Grunder's material is a bit different. He stresses that he is not interested in demonstrating direct connections so much as in finding these parallels in Joseph's environment. In some ways, as I will demonstrate in Grunder's parallels, he is conflating these two ideas—genetic and environmental connections. By stressing that what is found in parallels is not original, he is suggesting that the Mormon parallels he finds show that Mormon traditions and texts drew from their environment in a more or less genetic fashion.

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1. White and Fitzgerald, "Quod est comparandum," 36–37.

Comparing two bodies of literature is in itself not all that unusual, and much of the same process is involved as when we compare individual texts. As Linnér tells us: "So far I have dealt mainly with the relation between individual texts. The basic problems of method remain the same when the critic chooses to handle larger entities, such as whole *oeuvres*, literary periods, or even national literatures."<sup>2</sup>

Here, however, we run into another significant problem with Grunder's approach. He is attempting to compare Mormon sources with other texts from the same environment. Yet, as noted earlier, the Mormon sources are already a part of that environment. In attempting to separate them—in attempting to make them a derivative of that environment in which they are themselves already in the act of influencing and changing—Grunder has misunderstood some of the issues. In order to separate them, we have to produce some kind of rational basis for distinguishing between the two groups of literature. Usually, this is not difficult:

We cannot escape the conclusion that personal, epistolary and literary relations between the two groups [i.e., German and English Romantics] were extremely tenuous. Among the English, only Coleridge and De Quincey show the influence of German Romantic ideas; among the Germans, English Romantic influences from Byron and Scott come later. The two movements existed at the same time, but they ran parallel without making deeper contacts, if we except Coleridge, whose very isolation points to the gulf between the two movements. But lack of historical contacts does not, of course, preclude similarities and even deep affinities.<sup>3</sup>

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2. Linnér, "Structure and Functions" 71–72.

3. René Wellek, *Confrontations: Studies in the Intellectual and Literary Relations Between Germany, England, and the United States During the*

Grunder insists that the “Mormon Parallels’ in this *Bibliographic Source* are aspects of Mormonism which first existed in a non-Mormon context available in Joseph Smith’s world” (2008, p. 37).

Part of the problem is that, at least for early Mormonism, every single early Mormon (without exception) existed first in a non-Mormon context, including Joseph Smith. There is no line of demarcation that separates many of these texts related to Mormonism from that larger environment. That environment shaped Mormonism just as Mormonism in return contributes to that evolving environment. Grunder’s approach separates them by saying, in essence, “These on the one side are Mormon sources, and these on the other side are everything else.” Part of my methodological concerns require that we redirect that initial suggestion, return these Mormon “sources” back to their environment, and examine the parallels from a more appropriate perspective. In some cases, this may eliminate or reduce claims of uniqueness of a specific teaching. In other cases it may enhance them.

I will begin by providing a series of basic definitions. These detail in general terms the major categories of parallels, and provide some basic guidelines to help identify what ought not to be considered a valid parallel. Following these definitions, I will address the issue of significance—that is, what kinds of parallels are purely environmental (and thus not significant at all in helping us understand the texts) and which are derivative in some way either from the broader environment or from specific sources. By separating these two categories, even if I fail to address the more complex situations, I can at least identify parallels that deserve more attention, and cut away those that while certainly parallels, have little interest to us. Additionally,

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*Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 1965), 11, as cited in Linnér, “Structure and Functions,” 72.

I will comment on the selection of texts used as the basis for Grunder's *Bibliography*.

### What constitutes a valid parallel?

The term *parallel* itself is often used in different ways. A dictionary definition reads:

- 1 a : a parallel line, curve, or surface b : one of the imaginary circles on the surface of the earth paralleling the equator and marking the latitude; *also* : the corresponding line on a globe or map—see latitude illustration c : a character || used in printing especially as a reference mark
- 2 a : something equal or similar in all essential particulars : counterpart b : similarity, analogue
- 3 : a comparison to show resemblance
- 4 a : the state of being physically parallel b : an arrangement of electrical devices in a circuit in which the same potential difference is applied to two or more resistances with each resistance being on a different branch of the circuit—compare series c : an arrangement or state that permits several operations or tasks to be performed simultaneously rather than consecutively.<sup>4</sup>

The definitions that we are most interested in are the second and third. The notion of a parallel of the sort that Grunder is using both shows a resemblance by comparison, and claims that there are these equivalencies between the sets of otherwise disparate elements that Grunder has produced.

A parallel, then, represents some kind of similarity. It can be a verbal similarity in the text (involving use of the same or similar words). It can be a thematic similarity involving the same kinds of ideas. It can be a structural similarity for which ordering is important. It might be a purely aesthetic similarity where the appearance of the text is highlighted. Part of identi-

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4. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2010), s.v., "parallel". Retrieved 22 August 2010, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/parallel>

fying the parallel is to find a way to make it apparent and visible to others:

It should be noticed here that the comparative demonstration, however subtle and protracted it may be, still does not lead up to a logical deduction. We are not asked by the critic to draw a conclusion, but to confirm that we see what he points out to be seen. I believe this comes rather close to what the biologist does when he compares microscopic slides from two species. He fills in a certain pattern (of nerves, cells, or whatnot) so as to make it more easily observable. It has been there all the time, and the preparation does not add anything; it only helps us to distinguish one particular pattern among many others.<sup>5</sup>

This is a rather broad definition, but I think it is useful, particularly if we are interested in evaluating parallels that involve more than deliberate mimesis—that is, parallels that are attributable to environmental issues or even those that appear to be entirely coincidental. However, if we use the above analogy, there are instances where what we see does not give us sufficient evidence of a pattern with which to claim some kind of meaningful sameness.

### **Verbal Parallels: Words**

Early in his list of parallels, Grunder offers us three virtually identical proposals (2008, pp. 62–65). The proposed similarity occurs in a single word: Comoro compared to the name Cumorah in the Book of Mormon (and Grunder notes the several variants of this word in the original manuscript and the printer’s manuscript of the Book of Mormon as well as in at least one other early LDS source—“Comoro,” “Camorah,”

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5. Linnér, “Structure and Functions,” 171.



“Cumorah,” and “Comorah”). Later, he provides other examples, as he notes: “Homonyms to the Book of Mormon’s Hill Cumorah appeared in many works of the period” (2008, p. 517). He details many of these: Comora (2008, p. 694); Cormorant (2008, p. 303)—which he describes as “resonant with the name, ‘Cumorah’”—“Cormorin” (2008, p. 1637-8); “Go-mor’rah” (2008, p. 1821) and its variant “Gomorra” (2008, p. 1921), both places add identical information “cf. Cumorah, both sites of massive destruction of the wicked.”

All of these parallels are problematic. When we deal with homonyms (using the term rather loosely as Grunder does), part of the point is that there is no relationship between the words. They merely sound alike, or look alike. We could add to his list—“Camorra” (a secret society in Italy that originated some time before the Book of Mormon was published), “Camora” (generally spelled “Zamora” today, a city in Spain that was besieged during the 11th century—and even described in the popular story of Don Quixote), and the city of Komarno in Hungary, located at the confluence of the Danube and the Vah rivers.<sup>6</sup>

Can we speak of parallels in a single word? Is the word “too” really a parallel to the word “two” or to the word “to”? Do these help us understand a text or a relationship between one text and another? Clearly they don’t. I think that we have to conclude that in nearly every case, these are not valid parallels.

Part of the issue here goes to Grunder’s purposes in eliminating originality. Generally speaking, we see words as the basic units of meaning in texts. It is the fact that we all use the same words that lets us communicate in texts. Occasionally we might encounter unknown words, or unique words, or an

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6. The highlight of the city was a fortress, completely surrounded by water, which has been a significant strategic position since at least Roman times. A 1594 map of the fortress can be seen here: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Komarno1594.jpg>

author may produce a neologism. But to reduce originality even in the words that are not had elsewhere, we must reduce them to a sequence of letters and sounds (which then no longer have any meaning at all) and locate similarities to them. Since all words are sequences of letters and sounds, it isn't difficult at all to create a nearly endless string of such similarities (particularly if we, like Grunder, are not too fussy over identical sounds or spellings). If we allow for parallels of this sort, then no word is ever unique or original.<sup>7</sup> There are several parallel sources listed in Grunder's work that follow this pattern.<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, there is another concern. At times, Grunder seems to be arguing for a genetic connection between a specific pair of homonyms. If the only concern is for similar looking or sounding words, then there isn't a need for additional explanation beyond placing the terms in the environment. When Grunder quotes Buchanan as saying, "If subsequent research on the origins of the names Moroni and Cumorah point to the Comoro Islands as a source . . ." (2008, p. 867) he is forwarding this argument for a genetic connection. When he suggests, as I note above that Gomorrah is a plausible parallel for Cumorah

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7. Although, as an example of an exception, we have *The Codex Seraphinianus*, written by Luigi Serafini. "The book is approximately 360 pages long (depending on the edition), and appears to be a visual encyclopedia of an unknown world, written in one of its languages, a thus-far undeciphered alphabetic writing" ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex\\_Seraphinianus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Seraphinianus)). Since the text uses its own characters and its own language, it has not been translated or read by anyone other than its author. It thus illustrates the problem with using something absolutely original in this kind of context—it has no meaning that others can grasp and thus fails as a communicative act.

8. See especially pages 1921–24 where the source is listed as: *A COMPREHENSIVE PRONOUNCING AND EXPLANATORY DICTIONARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, with Pronouncing Vocabularies of Classical and Scripture Proper Names*. Although Grunder emphasizes that the name section contains only 12 pages, he doesn't mention that each of those pages may contain as many as 350 names. To find some similarities when comparing Book of Mormon names to the several thousand other names presented in this source should not be unexpected, particularly when we are only looking at the spellings, and allowing for a fair amount of variance between the two similar words.

because “both [were] sites of massive destruction of the wicked” Grunder is making an argument for a genetic connection. And yet both cannot be the source of the name Cumorah in the Book of Mormon. If even one of these is accurate, then all of the others must be coincidental parallels. Perhaps Grunder is arguing that Joseph synthesized the name Cumorah from the entire list of potential homonyms—and yet this strains credulity. All of these near homonyms cannot have equal value, and yet Grunder presents them as if they do.

For the reasons provided above, similarity between words (based on sounds and characters used) are generally only useful when we deal with questions of derivation, of etymology, and (for texts) with genetic connections. There is no value to dealing with words when we discuss environmental similarities. My methodology rejects as parallels these kinds of similarities between single words unless one of the more direct relationships mentioned above can also be determined.

Parallels identified on the basis of the words used are called verbal parallels. In providing for the widest useful identification of verbal parallels, I have adopted the definition of Jon Paulien:

A Verbal parallel can be defined as occurring whenever at least two words of more than minor significance are parallel between [sources]. . . . These two major words may be coupled together in a phrase or may even be separated, provided they are in clear relationship to each other in both passages of the suggested parallel.<sup>9</sup>

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9. Jon Paulien, “Elusive Allusions,” *Bible Review* 33 (1988): 41–42. Paulien recognizes that parallels can occur in a single word. He writes: “Allusions to the OT may be characterized by similarity of thought and theme as well as wording. Such single-word parallels are to be distinguished from ‘stock apocalyptic’ in that they have ‘direct contextual moorings in particular texts’ of previous literature” (p. 42). This is in line with my recognition of single words as potential legitimate parallels when they are used within a context of reliance or genetic relationships.

## Verbal Parallels: Shared Phrases

Of course, longer strings of identical text (much more than two words) provide a self-evident demonstration of their relationship to each other. But when the text is not of sufficient length, we must concern ourselves with showing that the words are used in similar ways, that their meanings are similar (as opposed to different), and that the relationships between the sources is otherwise consistent. Of course, one of the ways that this is commonly done is to show the relative uniqueness or some kind of technical usage of the shared phrase. It is at this point the Muriel St. Clair Byrne suggested we need to apply the “negative check.” As Harold Love explains:

Here LION, Gutenberg and similar electronic archives come into their own, since as well as providing illusory parallels they also assist mightily in shooting down those which arise from common parlance of the time. Once we have encountered an unusual expression in the writings of three of four different authors it ceases to have any value for attribution.<sup>10</sup>

While this is aimed at more direct genetic connections between texts and asserting authorship of one text based on similarities to another work or body of work, it applies here as well. Phrases that are part of the common language of the time do not generally help us. At best, they place a text within a certain time and place (but we generally already have such information for the Mormon parallels). In order to connect one text to a specific tradition or body of material, something more specific must be used. This argument is raised by Grunder in parallel 26 (2008, p. 130 ff). The issue there is the use of the phrase “secret combinations” in the Book of Mormon and in Masonic literature. While this argument is not new to Grunder (he ref-

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10. Love, *Attributing Authorship*, 91.

erences Dan Vogel's *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*, he attempts to extend Vogel's arguments over the nature of the phrase in response to criticisms of Vogel's work.<sup>11</sup>

Grunder attempts to bolster Vogel's arguments by suggesting that to him, "the objections by early 1830 *Masons who were opposed* to applying the term, 'all secret combinations' exclusively to Freemasonry and other secret fraternal societies—and many antimasons' insistence that 'all secret combinations' *did* refer *exclusively* to such groups, by that time and in such context—says much" (2008, p. 130). He insists that this usage of the phrase is exclusive to this context.

In addition, we are told, contrary opinions are "utterly innocent of the most obvious consideration of the evolution of language." Grunder then goes on to provide what he believes is an analogous situation:

Most alert, educated individuals of the 1960s–70s, for example, must have noticed the linguistic evolution of the term, chauvinism. Prior to the 1970s women's movement, that term was heard rather infrequently, and its definition was the one which it had enjoyed since the early mid-nineteenth century—that of "Exaggerated patriotism of a bellicose sort; blind enthusiasm for national glory or military ascendancy . . ." (Oxford English Dictionary, 1971 edition). By the mid-

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11. Grunder mentions Daniel C. Peterson, "'Secret Combinations' Revisited," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1992): 184–88; Paul Mouritsen, "Secret Combinations and Flaxen Cords: Anti-Masonic Rhetoric and the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/1 (2003): 64–77; Nathan Oman, "'Secret Combinations': A Legal Analysis," *FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004): [49]–73; and Andrew H. Hedges and Dawson W. Hedges, "No, Dan, That's Still Not History" (review of Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*. [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004]), *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 205–22. He ignores Daniel C. Peterson, "Notes on 'Gadian-ton Masonry,'" in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 174–224.

1970s, however, most of us heard the term only in conjunction with “male,” until finally, a chauvinist, in everyday speech, came to mean a man who was blind to women’s issues. Then, as that specialized application of the word became entrenched and common, it evolved further, expanded in popular usage to apply to a person who was irrationally prejudiced against any cause at hand. (2008, p. 131)

There is a severe problem with Grunder’s comparison here. If we follow Harold Love’s advice, we find hundreds of examples of the use of this phrase “secret combination.” Some of them occur before the publication of the Book of Mormon, some of them occur after, and some of them are contemporary. On the whole, only a minority of these instances relate to freemasonry. So while there may be a distinct evolution of the term *chauvinism*, with the phrase *secret combinations* we have the same term being used repeatedly to refer to different things and different groups. The term doesn’t evolve as Grunder’s claim requires. It gets applied and reapplied to these different organizations (often simultaneously when the time period is appropriate) because the meaning of the phrase doesn’t change (as it did with the example that Grunder provides).

Grunder then provides us with three “intellectual wrongs” that he explains are used by those who disagree with Vogel’s theory:

(1) He or she will look for the term *chauvinist* primarily in sober, formal writings, rather than in whatever popular-level (or simple ephemeral) productions which may have survived. He will do this by searching easily-accessible documents rather than spending decades perusing obscure remnants and productions of the grass-roots culture of the entire twentieth century. (2008, p. 132)

Love gives us a different perspective on this. He tells us that:

When Byrne wrote, the accumulation of parallels was a labour-intensive business which depended on incessant reading of the works concerned. Today a phrase can be pursued almost instantaneously through the magnificent on-line LION archive, which covers all fields of English and American drama and of authored volumes of poetry up to 1900, and in many cases beyond, and is rapidly extending into prose.<sup>12</sup>

The search through digital archives is simple, it is fast—if it were used as the primary source for documenting a parallel (as Grunder is doing) it would be inappropriate. As a negative check, as Love explains, these digital archives work very well to identify when an argument has overstepped the evidence. Grunder's criteria for selecting texts helps create a hidden bias.<sup>13</sup> What Grunder labels as an intellectual wrong—using these archives as a negative check on the hypothesis—is actually a very appropriate way to avoid the kinds of mistakes that have been identified over the last two centuries of literary investigation.

(2) He will consult only a very few contrary sources in his “research.” During his perfunctory visit among those sources, he will notice very few women's-issue occurrences of chauvinist. He must acknowledge a few examples which his scholarly opponents have already cited, but he will quantify those unfavorable occurrences carefully, creating an artificial impression of

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12. Love, *Attributing Authorship*, 90.

13. If, for example, all we look at is documents related to freemasonry, then it seems to me that Grunder has intuited a connection in exactly the same mode for which he criticizes others. To parody Grunder, the investigator will look for the term *secret combination* primarily in masonic texts rather spending decades perusing the rest of the cultural literary legacy in which the term may be found.

over-all low frequency, and a misleading impression of careful precision in his study. (2008, p 132)

Negative checks, by nature, generally don't need to include the evidence that is already presented. On the other hand, since the writing of those critical essays, the scope of accessible digital archives has increased. These kinds of experiments can be reproduced by anyone with Internet access. As of the writing of this essay, searching one digital archive suggested that between the beginning 1828 and the beginning of 1832, only 8.8 percent of published books that contained the phrase *secret combination* also included information on masons.<sup>14</sup> In this specific case, the over-all low frequency isn't just a misleading impression.

(3) Finding it difficult to identify equal frequency of chauvinist before the 1970s compared to the post-1970 period, he will extend his sampling generously backward before the relevant period. Then, he will carry the sampling forward, beyond the target period, taking care to identify enough widely-evolved usages of

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14. The Google Books digital archive, for example, provides us with 771 documents containing the phrase *secret combination* published between 1780 and 1840 (search completed Sept. 14, 2011). If we exclude all of the texts from that result that also include the character strings "freemason" and "mason", we end up with 750 texts. This is by no means an exact count due to issues with the archives, but, if only 2.8 percent of the texts that the Google search provided are Masonic related texts, clearly there is a problem with Grunder's assumptions here. For those wishing to try this experiment themselves, the search is done at books.google.com, with a date range set to 1/1/1780 to 1/1/1840, and the search terms are +"secret combination" -mason -freemason (the + forces inclusion while the - forces exclusion in the search). This is just one digital archive—it is the sheer volume of hits that makes us seriously question Grunder's conclusions. If we narrow the same search down to 1/1/1828-1/1/1832, we get 103 and 94 as the results—the number of texts dealing with freemasons has gone up significantly from 2.8 percent to 8.8 percent—a huge surge which we would expect considering the contemporary issues that Grunder points out. But, this surge does not begin to suggest that there is such a narrowing of the language that Grunder insists had to have happened.



the now-popularized term to create an illusion of an even continuum of traditional or non-women's-movement definitions and occurrences of chauvinist, over a period of a century or more. Such an approach, then, would ignore the genuine frequency, the placement, and the significance of the linguistic term under study by searching primarily the most easily-accessible, formal texts; by ignoring the sources most likely to contain contrary data; and by ignoring the entire phenomenon of the evolution of a linguistic term's definition and frequency of use when impacted by a single, dramatic, concentrated social movement. (2008, p. 132)

The reverse is certainly also true. If we present only Masonic documents from a very narrow slice of time, if we ignore all instances of a phrase that are both contemporary and relevant (relevant because it is an identical phrase used in the same environment that the Masonic documents come from), and we ignore the genuine frequency of the phrase in the total body of literature created by the larger cultural milieu, then we create a picture where only one conclusion can be drawn. The difference of course between the anti-masonic movement and the feminist movement is that the first died almost immediately. Within less than a decade, the anti-masonic movement was over, and the fraternal societies had become even more popular than they were before the Morgan affair.<sup>15</sup> The feminist movement was not a brief vanishing phenomenon, and has

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15. See, for example, Ami Pflugrad-Jackisch's *Brothers of a Vow: Secret Fraternal Orders and the Transformation of White Male Culture in Antebellum Virginia* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 28: "The orders' widespread popularity did not come easily, however. The Morgan affair and the subsequent anti-Masonic movement of the 1830s threatened to stamp out American secret fraternal organizations once and for all. Beginning in the 1840s, however, secret fraternal orders resurrected their fraternities and remade their public image, becoming even more popular than they had been during the early national period. In the decades leading up to the Civil War, white men estab-

persisted for decades. On the other hand, the notion of “secret combinations” has been used to describe labor movements, Freemasons, members of the Ku Klux Klan, communists, and even the Republican Party, along with nearly every other group or organization that has been accused of nefarious motivations. This continuum of usage works because the phrase has never linguistically evolved into such a narrow technical framework as the word *chauvinist* did.

Grunder is quite right in the idea that technical usage or exclusive similarities can create significant parallels. However, in this case, his narrow focus on sources prevents him from properly applying a negative check. In responding to Grunder’s short list, I suggest that these issues are “intellectual wrongs” only if we use them as evidence for our theory. When used (as the critical arguments do) as a negative check, these approaches are not only important, they are necessary to either validate the argument, or in this case, to refute it.

### Thematic Parallels

Moving away from words and phrases, we encounter the notion of meaning. Thematic parallels are parallels in thought, in doctrine, or in practice that go beyond the mere words used to convey that thought. Like words, there can be limitations to the range of these parallels:

Perhaps the first thing to observe is that there are only a limited number of options in any given historical setting. Only a certain number of ideas are possible and only a certain number of ways of doing things are available. We need not wonder at similarities, which need not necessarily be a sign of borrowing, in one direction or the other. Many things in a given historical and cultural setting will be arrived at independently by more than one group, simply because there is not an unlim-

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lished more than a dozen new secret fraternal orders modeled on the Masons and Odd Fellows.”

ited number of options available about how to do something. For example, how many ways are there to select leaders in a community? We could list inheritance, election, appointment by one or a few in authority, or chance (e.g., casting lots). Any additions made to the list will not generally extend the range of possibilities. That two groups use the same method does not necessarily mean that one is copying the other.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, we aren't entirely concerned here with copying (genetic relationships), yet the point is valid for this discussion. Thematic parallels can occur naturally. As with words, we need to look at contexts—comparing the similarities we see with the differences—and in this way determine if we have a valid parallel or a superficial similarity that is not carried out by a more detailed analysis. Do the proposed thematic parallels work the same way in both places? Are the similarities essential to the material (i.e., are the ways in which the proposed text, narratives, practices, or doctrines more central to the individual traditions than their differences)?

### Structural Parallels

Structural parallels are not about the textual content, but about how it is presented. Structural parallels generally are far more significant in determining genetic connections because they often imply that one text is modeled or patterned on another text. When we see two or more texts that follow a specific and identical pattern—when they both introduce similar language and themes in the same order—we have structural parallels.<sup>17</sup> As with the other kinds of parallels, the longer the pattern is sustained, the stronger the parallel becomes. Structural paral-

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

17. Paulien, "Elusive Allusions," 43. See also my discussion in Ben McGuire, "Nephi and Goliath: A Case Study of Literary Allusion in the Book of Mormon," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 18/1 (2009): 16–31.

lels can also include stylized forms (existing in poetic material), aesthetic appearances, and even sequences of sound when read aloud.

With structural parallels, our concern with differences is also important, but in a different way. Structural similarities can occur within an entire body of material (like the Ten Commandments from Hebrew scripture), and yet there are often variances in order and content. Finding a set of the Ten Commandments would place a text into that group of materials that contains such a list, but the specific ordering or pattern might narrow down the field of potential genetic connections. In several cases we might consider (as with thematic parallels) the potential for similar sequences being quite independent, even if identical. Birth and death are such natural parts of any person's experience that finding the one before another in a text, while clearly a parallel, wouldn't necessarily give us a reason to look beyond simple coincidence. The significance of such structural parallels is diminished when many sources share the same structure.

### **Parallels in Art**

Among Grunder's set of parallels are pieces of artwork. Art, in general, is a more difficult topic in which to discuss parallels because it often comes without an appropriate framework for comparison. In these cases, we need to be particularly cognizant of how important placing these parallels into an appropriate social and cultural context is, and then try to understand how important the similar elements are within those independent contexts. The purpose and the intention of an entire piece of art then becomes important (even if difficult to assess) when attempting to compare art, and our own interpretation plays an obvious role (as the present viewer). Here we see the greatest room for making our own expectations play an exaggerated role in finding parallels where none actually exist.

## The Two Column Format

One of the traditional ways of presenting parallels is the sort that Grunder generally follows—the two column format. We present the two texts side by side to highlight the similarities. In some instances, particularly when a parallel has been noted extensively in other literature, he simply refers us to that literature.<sup>18</sup> This approach, as demonstrated earlier, has generally been widely criticized. In dealing with this approach here, one set of more recent criticisms stands out. Alexander Lindey detailed many of what he calls the “vices” of using parallels in his book *Plagiarism and Originality*:

1. Any method of comparison which lists and underscores similarities and suppresses or minimizes differences is necessarily misleading.
2. Parallels are too readily susceptible of manipulation. Superficial resemblances may be made to appear as of the essence.
3. Parallel-hunters do not, as a rule, set out to be truthful and impartial. They are hell-bent on proving a point.
4. Parallel-hunting is predicated on the use of lowest common denominators. Virtually all literature, even the most original, can be reduced to such terms, and thereby shown to be unoriginal. So viewed, Mark Twain's *The Prince and the Pauper* plagiarizes Dickens' *David Copperfield*. Both deal with England, both describe the

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18. For example, parallel 1, the author James Adair and his works are mentioned, along with a number of secondary sources (Bushman, Brodie, and Vogel). There is no presentation of actual parallels, and the reader is expected to turn to the secondary literature to discover them. Grunder does, however, attempt to place the material in close proximity to Brigham Young: “A similar list from Adair was printed in a newspaper of the town in which teen-aged Brigham Young was living in 1819 (MP 32, Auburn Gazette)” (2008, 58) This kind of appeal isn't terribly meaningful in an argument that is purely about environmental issues—instead it suggests that Grunder is trying to establish a more intimate connection necessary for an argument of genetic connections.

slums of London, both see their hero exalted beyond his original station. To regard any two books in this light, however, is to ignore every factor that differentiates one man's thoughts, reactions and literary expression from another's.

5. Parallel columns operate piecemeal. They wrench phrases and passages out of context. A product of the imagination is indivisible. It depends on totality of effect. To remove details from their setting is to falsify them.
6. Parallels fail to indicate the proportion which the purportedly borrowed material bears to the sum total of the source, or to the whole of the new work. Without such information a just appraisal is impossible.
7. The practitioners of the technique resort too often to sleight of hand. They employ language, not to record facts or to describe things accurately, but as props in a rhetorical hocus-pocus which, by describing different things in identical words, appears to make them magically alike.
8. A double-column analysis is a dissection. An autopsy will reveal a great deal about a cadaver, but very little about the spirit of the man who once inhabited it.
9. Most parallels rest on the assumption that if two successive things are similar, the second one was copied from the first. This assumption disregards all the other possible causes of similarity.

Whatever his vices or virtues, the parallel-hunter is a hardy species. He is destined, as someone had said, to persist until Judgment Day, when he will doubtless find

resemblances in the very warrant that consigns him to the nether regions.<sup>19</sup>

These vices point out the dangers of asserting a genetic connection between two texts (or between two traditions). While Grunder tries to deflect this kind of criticism in dealing as he suggests with environmental issues, most of these criticisms still apply to the collection that Grunder has produced. How do we avoid making these mistakes? I engage a set of four similar rules:

- Differences are as important as similarities.
- Parallels need to be examined in progressively expanding contexts.
- Parallels should be discussed in a detailed and specific fashion.
- Rhetorical values, the intentions of an author, and the purposes of a text should all to be taken into consideration.

To illustrate these 4 principles, I will apply them towards the parallel Grunder titles: “REST NEEDED FROM MENTAL EXERCISE; the Mind like a Tightly-Strung Bow” (2008, p. 69). The parallel, as Grunder presents it, is as follows. The first source is taken from William Alcott’s *The Young Man’s Guide*, originally published in 1833. The second is taken from a personal recollection published in the *Juvenile Instructor* on August 1, 1892. Both are reproduced here from Grunder’s text.

Source 1:

Some of our students *in commons* and elsewhere, suppose themselves highly meritorious because they have adopted the plan of appointing one of their number to read to the company, while the rest are eating. But they

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19. Alexander Lindey, *Plagiarism and Originality* (Westbrook, CT: Greenwood Press, 1952), 60–61.

are sadly mistaken. Nothing is gained by the practice. On the contrary, much is lost by it. The bow cannot always remain bent, without injury. Neither can the mind always be kept 'toned' to a high pitch. *Mind* and *body* must and will have their relaxations [p. 68].

Source 2:

. . . I have played ball with him [Joseph Smith] many times in Nauvoo. He was preaching once, and he said it tried some of the pious folks to see him play ball with the boys. He then related a story of a certain prophet who was sitting under the shade of a tree amusing himself in some way, when a hunter came along with his bow and arrow, and reproved him. The prophet asked him if he kept his bow strung up all the time. The hunter answered that he did not. The prophet asked why, and he said it would lose its elasticity if he did. The prophet said it was just so with his mind, he did not want it strung up all the time. . . . [Elder William M(oore). Allred, St. Charles, Bear Lake County, Idaho, b. 1819, quoted in "Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith," *Juvenile Instructor* 27/15 (1 August 1892): 472.]

### *Sameness and Difference*

Comparisons by nature suggest examining two or more things. If we reduce texts to their similarities, the only conclusions we can draw is that they are alike (even if that view is in error). By introducing the differences, we can start to look a little deeper at what makes the comparison interesting. Are the elements that first seemed similar only superficially so? Are they in fact quite closely related? Does the use of a particular phrase in one text provide additional understanding for the use of a similar phrase in another text? In this case, the texts were chosen for several reasons. One of them is that there is an obvi-



ous similarity. It occurs in the use of the idea of a strung bow as a metaphor applied to the mind. But, with that similarity also come differences (if there weren't any differences we would have identical texts).

First, in the Alcott text, the reference is not just to the mind. Alcott tells us that "*Mind* and *body* must and will have their relaxations." There is no reference to the body in the Allred recollection. The other primary difference between the two is the language. Despite the header that Grunder gives it, only the words "bow" and "mind" occur in both selections, and the word "strung" occurs only in the Allred recollection. The other words—rest, needed, mental, exercise, tightly—occur in neither text. These observations give us something to look at more closely. Does the language used tell us anything about the natures of these two texts within their specific contexts? Does the distinction between *Mind* and *Mind and Body* warrant further examination?

*Context: An Expanding Circle*

The Alcott passage is taken from his *The Young Man's Guide*. It is one of a genre of books (which continues, although in very different forms perhaps, to the present time) in which instruction is provided for young people. It is divided into seven chapters, each with several sections. The quote that Grunder provides comes from the seventh section ("On Forming Temperate Habits") of the first chapter ("On the Formation of Character"), which consists of guidelines for eating and drinking. The section in which the quotation is taken deals with issues of eating too quickly (or not quickly enough), and appropriate conversation at the dinner table. The full paragraph in which it occurs (which is helpful for understanding the context) is provided below:

The idea of preventing conversation about what we eat is also foolish, though Dr. Franklin and many very wise

men, may have thought otherwise. Some of our students in *commons* and elsewhere, suppose themselves highly meritorious because they have adopted the plan of appointing one of their number to read to the company while the rest are eating. But they are sadly mistaken. Nothing is gained by the practice. On the contrary, much is lost by it. The bow cannot always remain bent, without injury. Neither can the mind always be kept “toned” to a high pitch. *Mind* and *body* must and will have their relaxations, or be revenged on us.

What sort of injury does Alcott suggest will come? He tells us in the preceding paragraph that inappropriate eating produces “stomach or liver complaints, or gout or rheumatism.” And after providing us with the material Grunder quotes, he tells us in no uncertain terms: “But I do say, and with emphasis, that food must be *masticated*.” This is not so much a text about mental exercise as it is about proper habits while eating.

The Allred recollection on the other hand, is quite short—part of a longer series of recollections by various other individuals, but the Allred comments are distinct both from the rest of the article and from the periodical in which they were published. They are reproduced below in their entirety:

As I was not quite fifteen years old when I first saw him, I cannot remember many of his sayings at that time; but as he was returning, he preached in the Salt River Branch.

I was with him in the troubles at DeWitt, Adam-on-di-ahman, and in Far West. I have played ball with him many times in Nauvoo. He was preaching once, and he said it tried some of the pious folks to see him play ball with the boys. He then related a story of a certain prophet who was sitting under the shade of a tree

amusing himself in some way, when a hunter came along with his bow and arrow, and reproved him. The prophet asked him if he kept his bow strung up all the time. The hunter answered that he did not. The prophet asked why, and he said it would lose its elasticity if he did. The prophet said it was just so with his mind, he did not want it strung up all the time. Another time when I heard him preaching he said if he should tell the people all the Lord had revealed to him, some would seek his life. Even as good a man as old Father C----, here on the stand, he added, (pointing back to him) would seek his life.

I was present when he preached the first sermon on baptism for the dead. I remember my father said it was astonishing to him to think he had read the Bible all his life and he had never looked at it in that light before. I was present at the first baptism for the dead.

The contexts seem to be quite different. It is true that there is a similarity there, but that similarity isn't nearly as neat and tidy when we look at larger contexts; at this point, we need to expand our examination beyond the two texts in question.

#### *Frequency in Other Sources*

Earlier, I quoted the 5th of Muriel C. St. Byrne's five golden rules:

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>20</sup>

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20. Byrne, "Bibliographical Clues in Collaborate Plays," *The Library: A Quarterly Review of Bibliography* 13/1 (June 1932): 24.

The idea behind the negative check is quite simple: if we can find a proposed verbal parallel in multiple sources, then it becomes very unlikely that the parallel in question is one of genetic nature. The same idea applies when we compare a text to a larger body of materials or a tradition—if we can find the same parallels outside of that body of literature or that tradition, then establishing a connection between the text and that tradition or body of material becomes much more difficult. Most digital archives allow for searching by date range. The two primary electronic repositories I use are Google Books and the Making of America Archive hosted by the University of Michigan.<sup>21</sup>

Grunder indicates that he is specifically looking at the environmental argument:

It may be appropriate here to remind the reader that Mormon parallel works need not be candidates as specific sources necessarily consulted by Joseph Smith. Instead, this *Bibliographic Source* seeks to offer a broad and realistic social/intellectual context for Joseph's teachings in a variety of generally significant texts such as the one here at hand. (2008, p. 66)

When we begin searching for these parallels, our perception of Grunder's similarities begins to change dramatically. There are two larger traditions that these two texts variously use, and both find wide circulation at the time of Joseph Smith. The first comes to us through the Odes of Horace (written sometime around 23 BC). The passage in question comes from Book 2, chapter 10, line 19: *Neque semper arcum tendit Apollo*. John Devoe Belton explains to us that this phrase means: "*Apollo does not always keep his bow bent*. The quotation is ordinarily used in the sense that there are times when we all need relax-

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21. These databases can be found at [books.google.com](http://books.google.com) and <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moagrp/>

ation from the point of high tension.”<sup>22</sup> Of course, the original text by Horace doesn’t convey this sentiment, but we know that it had built this public perception much earlier than the texts we are currently considering, as we see from this commentary originally published in 1712:

*Homer* says, that the Arrows of this God brought the Plague into the *Grecian* Camp; the Reason of which is evident. In like Manner, when *Horace* says here, that *Apollo* has not always his Bow bent, he means that *Apollo* does not always afflict Mankind with the foremention’d Calamities; it is therefore a wrong Application of these Words, which a great many make, when they use them to express that the Mind ought not always to be upon the Stretch, but should now and then be allowed some Relaxation.<sup>23</sup>

The phrase in several forms became something of a euphemism. Alcott himself had already used it in 1839, in another of his books:

It is impossible for the liver to be thus excited, at times, to increased action, without falling into correspondent inactivity at other times. The bow cannot always remain bent—it must react or rebound. The pendulum, too, which has vibrated too far in one direction, will vibrate

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22. John Devoe Belton, *A Literary manual of Foreign Quotations, Ancient and Modern with Illustrations from American and English Authors and Explanatory Notes* (New York: G. Putnam’s Sons, 1891), 122. Devoe continues by quoting *Guy Mannering*, the novel published by Walter Scott in 1815: “And pray, Mr. Sampson, are these three hours entirely spent in construing and translating?” “Doubtless—no—we have also colloquial intercourse to sweeten study—*neque semper arcum tendit Apollo*.” Scott, “*Guy Mannering*,” Chap. 15.

23. David Watson, *The Odes, Epodes, and Carmen Seculare of Horace Translated into English Prose* (London, 1760), 153. I have quoted from the fourth edition of the text.

too far on the other direction, as the natural and inevitable consequence. So with the action of the liver.<sup>24</sup>

Here, the comparison is made—not between the mind and a bow, but uses the euphemism to refer again to the body, including the connection (only implicitly made here) that like the bow being injured, so too is the body injured. There are numerous allusions to this metaphor in literature,<sup>25</sup> and there is little doubt that this idea would have been at least somewhat familiar to the early followers of Joseph Smith.

The second tradition is also interesting. In the Allred recollection, Joseph relates a story about a prophet. Much like Horace, the source of that narrative is quite old, and can be traced back at least as far as John Cassian (AD 360–435). It seems unlikely (but possible) that Cassian was the author of this account (more likely he in turn adapted an earlier convention). R. Alan Culpepper provides a nice summary of the story: “John was stroking a partridge when a hunter appeared and expressed surprise that the great apostle was amusing himself in this way. John asked the hunter why he did not keep his bow strung all the time, and the hunter answered that if he did so, it would soon be weakened from the constant strain. John replied that just in the same way, the mind needs to relax from time to time.”<sup>26</sup>

Cassian’s text was quite popular and was quickly distributed and translated from the Latin into Greek. Later versions

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24. William Alcott, *Tea and Coffee* (Boston: George W. Light, 1839), 146–47.

25. Several of these references make a clear connection between the phrase that Alcott uses and Horace as a source. For example, “It may, perhaps, strike some readers as rather strange, that we should have ascribed to Cromwell a capacity for rough practical fun, little in accordance, no doubt, with the general stream of his character. But the bow cannot always remain bent; Neque semper arcum Tendit Apollo,” William Henry Farm, “Blanche Dorrimier (A Tale of the Commonwealth),” *Blackwood’s Lady’s Magazine* 10 (1841), 17.

26. R. Alan Culpepper, *John, The Son of Zebedee: The Life of a Legend* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), 196. Culpepper references several different versions of the story and traces a number of sources in his text.

often made changes,<sup>27</sup> but the story of John and the partridge remained largely intact. Closer to Joseph's time, this narrative was given a rebirth when it was used by Francis De Sales in his text titled *Introduction to the Devout Life*, first published in French in 1609, and subsequently published in many languages including English. In translation, De Sales account reads as follows:

It is necessary sometimes to relax our minds as well as our bodies by some kind of recreation. St. John the Evangelist, as Cassian relates, was one day found by a huntsman with a partridge on his hand, which he was caressing for his recreation. The huntsman asked how such a man as he could spend his time in so poor and mean an occupation? St. John replied: Why dost thou not carry thy bow always bent? For fear, answered the huntsman, that if it were always bent, it would loose its spring and become useless. Be not surprised, then, replied the apostle, that I should sometimes remit a little of the close application and attention of my spirit and enjoy a little recreation, that I may afterward employ myself more fervently in divine contemplation.<sup>28</sup>

The similarities between the Allred account and the narrative of John and the partridge are remarkable. It seems quite likely that when (as Allred recollects) Joseph related the story of "a certain prophet," that prophet was none other than John the Evangelist. The other elements follow in roughly the same order—a hunter sees the man amusing himself, confronts him, is asked about his bow, answers, and is then told that the mind is like the bow and needs to rest from time to time. This is a far more complex string of similarities, and there can be little

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27. E.g. *The Acts of John*, chapters 56 and 57.

28. Francis De Sales, *An Introduction to the Devout Life*, trans. unknown (London: Rivingtons, 1877), 177–78.

doubt that the story that Allred provides relies heavily (either directly or through Joseph Smith) on this tradition about John the Evangelist. There is also little doubt that these issues also reflect a tradition present in Joseph's environment. But Grunder's *Mormon Parallel* doesn't give us a cultural or intellectual context for Joseph's teaching.

*The Devil is in the Detail*

"It is as dangerous historically to exaggerate the similarities as it is to become overly comfortable with the differences" (1987, p. xviii).

In this specific example of the prophet and the bow, the header that Grunder provides, which functions also as a description of the parallel, is misleading. It is more of a synthesis or an interpretation of the two accounts that he is proposing. In order to make them appear more closely related than they are, he has used his own language to describe the similarity. This language also induces his readers to focus on certain generalities in order to highlight those similarities. As we look at the details, however, we notice differences. The more generic and less specific our comparison is, the more likely we are to be making errors. We cannot simply pay attention to the details that support the similarity. The counter question becomes important. If we present the differences in the same fashion that the similarities are presented, do we make at least as convincing a case in the opposite direction?

Comparisons don't have to be limited to two options, and by introducing additional texts to our comparison, we discover that some details glossed over or ignored really do matter. On this basis we can make some determinations about the nature of these proposed parallels. My conclusions, of course, do not change the idea that the text Allred gives us was influenced by his environment (or that Joseph's remarks weren't influenced by his immediate environment). What we learn is that the environment proposed by Grunder as represented in the Alcott



text was not that influence, and the parallel that he proposes is superficial and not significant.

### *Rhetorical Value*

The term *Rhetorical Value* probably needs some explanation. “Rhetoric is defined broadly to include all the linguistic and literary choices a writer makes in order to communicate with his audience.”<sup>29</sup> When we consider rhetoric, we are looking at the author and at the author’s intention.<sup>30</sup> Grunder comments briefly on this:

Of course I have focused upon my subject, and the selections were chosen from each work to demonstrate my thesis. What I have never done consciously—and I hope, never done at all—is to misrepresent an author’s intent in any passage through inappropriate choice of portions to quote. . . . cursory comparison of some of my selections beside their original full sources may cause the occasional reader to wonder why I did not quote more. I believe, however, that upon more extensive analysis, the integrity of my representations from these writings will stand. (2008, p. 44)

Never, however, have I consciously quoted these passages in any manner calculated to misconstrue the sense the authors intended. It was impossible to indulge in lengthy analysis of the possible relationships which may have existed between these citations and the Mormon elements to which they bear some affin-

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29. Gary L. Tandy, *The Rhetoric of Certitude: C.S. Lewis’s Nonfiction Prose* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2009), xi-xii.

30. This is not intended as an argument for or against the idea of authorial intention. It simply expresses the view that certain features of texts—like rhetorical figures—can only be understood in terms of the intentions of an author. Likewise, deliberate mimesis of a text or borrowing from a source can only be understood in terms of the intentions of an author.

ity. That is for the professional historians to undertake.  
(1978, p. xxxiv)

Looking for an author's intent is a work of interpretation. We may well get closer in some instances than in others. Grunder is right in holding that a detailed analysis of relationships between texts can be very lengthy. Already, my discussion of the Alcott-Allred parallel here far exceeds the half page that Grunder provides for it, where he literally provides nothing but the two texts in a two column parallel format. Without any discussion of interpretation, we can only guess at what Grunder has taken to be the author's intent. We can only guess at whether or not the text presented provides an accurate representation of that intent. In this way, however, Grunder has committed one of Lindey's vices: "5. Parallel columns operate piecemeal. They wrench phrases and passages out of context. A product of the imagination is indivisible. It depends on totality of effect. To remove details from their setting is to falsify them."<sup>31</sup>

Rhetorical value deals with interpretations and also intentions of the author's of texts. In the case of these two examples, we have some wildly variant contexts. The Alcott text occurs, as I noted, in a book of instruction for young men. More narrowly, it occurs in a section that is primarily devoted to consuming food and drink. The material touches on these subjects: drunkenness, gluttony, eating too quickly, conversation during meals (the context for the parallel Grunder provides), chewing your food, and drinking water. The section ends with these two rules:

1st. The fewer different articles of food used at any one meal, the better; however excellent in their nature those may be which are left untasted. 2. Never eat a moment longer than the food, if well masticated, ac-

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31. Lindey, *Plagiarism and Originality*, 61.

tually *revives* and *refreshes* you. The moment it makes you feel heavy or dull, or palls upon the taste, *you have passed the line of safety*.<sup>32</sup>

For us to assume that the essential point of this text—of the rhetoric—is that, without a break, mental exercise can be damaging to the mind is rather problematic. Only if we assume that the similarity is itself the essential message does this come through the text. On the other hand, the Allred narrative deals with a somewhat different issue. The problem, as the story tells us, isn't about mental exercise, it is why a man who is a prophet would spend his time engaged in such activities as playing with a partridge, or playing with children. In a sense though, the rhetorical purpose of the narrative is not only to justify the behavior of Joseph Smith, it also compares him in a not so subtle way to John the Evangelist, author of the Gospel of the same name in the New Testament. If it is okay for John to play with a partridge, it is certainly okay for Joseph to play ball with children. In this sense, the second text isn't really about the notion that the mind must occasionally take a break from mental exercise either. In focusing strictly on the similarities—in making them the essence of both texts, Grunder has reinterpreted them as referring to “mental exercise”—a misunderstanding of both sources grounded on a desire to conflate them.

A careful look at the rhetoric of each text—and more importantly at the rhetorical value and role played by the alleged similarities reveals two texts that are not very close at all.

### *Distance*

As a final concern in this particular example, there is an issue of distance. Grunder tells us that we should prefer closer (in terms of time and distance) sources to more distant sources. I think that this is generally good advice. However, in several cases (and the example being looked at here is not an excep-

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32. Alcott, *Tea and Coffee*, 57–58.

tion), the distance is between publication of the sources and not to alleged originals. Here, we have in Allred, a recollection written some decades after the events it claims to describe. It may well have been influenced in the intervening years—however, given that the tradition that the Allred account draws upon can be found through that entire time period, this has very little impact on the discussion.

Little could Joseph Smith, Sr., have imagined as well how popular his dream about the Tree of Life would eventually become among generations of Mormon Sunday Schoolers. Even though the dream as refined in the Book of Mormon narrative (1 Nephi 8) certainly represented an important didactic allegory for Mormon readers. (1987, p. xvii)

The account of Joseph Smith, Sr.'s dream is taken from Lucy Mack Smith's account written in 1845 (and later first published in 1853). As Grunder notes: "some scholars urge that Lucy may have read the later Book of Mormon imagery back into her husband's account (Bushman 1984, 50; Griggs, 259–60). In the end, we simply cannot know." The issue here ought to be clear. By 1844, the Book of Mormon was a part of the environment of Lucy Mack Smith (one with which we expect she was fairly familiar). There is some confusion here over the distinction between source and environment. Grunder wants us to understand that there is no strict evidence (apart from the similarities of course) that Smith's history relied on the Book of Mormon. And yet, Grunder uses her history as evidence of environmental sources that were specifically used by Joseph Smith in his production of the Book of Mormon. There is an inconsistency here that is created by first suggesting that distance is an important consideration when looking at parallels, and then ignoring that consideration when it doesn't suit the argument.

Distance is obviously a more important argument when looking at genetic connections. But it is also important when dealing with environmental suggestions as well. When making a claim for environmental causes, we need to be careful of what we insert into the environment and what it means. Those issues that often detract from genetic claims (multiple sources, patterns of language, etc.) often contribute toward an environmental understanding.

*A Note on Selecting Texts*

In any study of parallels, the process of choosing texts is important. In general, we are usually more concerned with what is left out than what is left in. Grunder provides us with the criteria that he used for inclusion in his list of materials:

SCOPE: LIMITED TO ITEMS WHICH I HAVE OWNED OR HANDLED.

A totally comprehensive study of Mormon parallels would be impossible, even for the period immediately surrounding Joseph Smith's religious work. It would require, in the strictest sense, an examination of every imprint and every manuscript, piece of art and other cultural artifact produced at the time. Even a thorough inspection of all printed holdings in American libraries for the period would be out of the question.

A line had to be drawn, so I drew it at personal ownership: I have only included items which I was able to discover and acquire (or accept personal responsibility for) in my own research collection or antiquarian business. I also included a very small number of items owned by friends. In two instances, I worked off copies supplied by friends, rather than the original imprints themselves. The kind of work I do is too slow and strenuous to perform while sitting in a library's rare book reading room.

Personal ownership or custody allowed leisure to examine many items thoroughly, often in excruciating detail, and it removed most potential restrictions of permission to publish or illustrate (2008, p. 47).<sup>33</sup>

In the age of digital archives, it is easier to be more inclusive than was Grunder. Better results come from being more and not less inclusive, and I prefer larger bodies of texts over smaller groupings. There are several reasons why inclusiveness is preferable. A bibliographic collection that Grunder has accumulated has such a narrow focus that it causes him to miss a great deal of information. Just as Mormonism comes out of something that precedes it, so does each of these texts belong to the historical era that both precedes and produces them and in which they were written. We expect to find connections between not just these texts but with every other text. While we can focus narrowly on the proposed sources for examination, the negative check needs to be far more inclusive than exclusive.

Much of this information could have been gathered by a quick search of electronic holdings that are publicly available. But in a work that is as polemical as is Grunder's collection, there is a sense in several places that he has acquired material and included it in this volume because others have suggested a connection. A good example of this is his inclusion of three maps (Parallels 3, 4, 5), which are included because of a single word found on those maps ("Comoro"). They are included because of a suggestion made by Frederick Buchanan, in a brief column in *Sunstone* in 1989.<sup>34</sup> Another instance, previously addressed, is the issue of connection between the tiered system of heaven and the Testament of Levi.

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33. In his earlier text, Grunder notes that his primary concern was with parallels to the Book of Mormon (1987, xviii).

34. See note 71 in Part One of this article.

The point here is that this is not some kind of routine or “objective” selection process. Grunder has included in his collection of presumed parallels nearly every text that others have suggested might have been used as a source for the Book of Mormon. In many cases, Grunder doesn’t provide the parallels—he simply references the works of others. In other cases, some references are noticeably absent. This is exactly the wrong way to go about this process.<sup>35</sup>

One additional issue needs to be needs to be raised. Many of Grunder’s sources are rare if not unique. Obtaining access to these sources can be difficult. This isn’t merely an issue of checking Grunder’s accuracy, but in having full texts available for comparison. This creates at times an increased burden on anyone seeking to expand or examine his comparisons. While electronic archives have expanded in recent years, and a great many of his rarer sources are now reasonably accessible, Grunder has made it very difficult to verify his sources, or to recontextualize them outside of his interpretation of essentialness of the material he presents. To return to the question of “Comoro,” we have an extreme example in a map of Africa, where he extracts a single word (one that is a homonym and not even an exact match) to compare to a single word used nine times in the Book of Mormon. Without the pre-determination of significance, such a parallel would never be recognized by readers of these texts. In many cases, without the full texts, we cannot even evaluate our own responses to the suggestions.

#### *Once More: Genetic versus Environmental Parallels*

In the specific example I used, we found neither genetic nor significant environmental parallels between the two sources that Grunder proposed. For each source, though, I was able to determine an environmental parallel—a textual ancestor and

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35. For a discussion on this theme, see Linnér, “Structure and Functions,” 172–74.

traditional interpretation on which each was dependent and so perhaps genetically linked. In dealing with environmental parallels, the key feature is not a single text but a host of them, all of which share a set of common features. Genetic parallels generally look at single texts and their relationships.

In several cases, Grunder explains to us that he is not interested in pointing to a direct connection between his sources and the Mormon texts he provides. He speaks of environmental studies (2008, p. 39). He wants us to find Mormonism in everything, and everywhere. This isn't a terribly difficult task. And it isn't particularly interesting. All that his kind of study can do for us is to verify in some sense that Mormonism is a real movement with a real history that grew out of a specific time and place. It cannot tell us much more than that. The most basic kind of similarity that Grunder presents us with are homophones. On pages 898–99, he presents us, for example, with a list of “terms which sound similar to later ‘Mormon’ words.” If we define *Mormon Words* in the same way Grunder defines *Mormon Parallels* (that is, as words in “Mormonism which first existed in a non-Mormon context available in Joseph Smith’s world” [2008, p. 47]), then we could safely assume that everything could be adequately covered by environmental studies. The same could be said of every religious movement, every society (as a whole), and every culture. There isn’t much that is unique when presented in this fashion. Because of this, such a study would be absolutely useless. Grunder’s claim that he is purely interested in environmental concerns seems problematic. He tells us, for example that:

These ideas crept through the culture not only by being read, but through more subtle and often indefinable processes which occurred in art, singing, gossip, storytelling, preaching and praying, and through other aspects of a particularly active system of oral tradition



which had to flourish then even more powerfully than in today's mass-media-communicated world. And, as is still the case today, the appearance of an idea in *written* and *printed* sources generally suggested the presence of that idea already circulating *orally* somewhere—if not everywhere—in the environment. The books and papers which I analyze in this *Bibliographic Source* were thus no more causes than they were *indicators*: not necessarily contributing directly to the mind of Joseph Smith, but standing as evidence that the thoughts which he proclaimed were waiting in the air. These works do not presume that “Joseph Smith once read us,” so much as they insist that “we were already there.” (2008, p. 38)

The fact that we can find such texts is an indication that their content is in the environment.<sup>36</sup> When Grunder makes comments about his sources, he tries to make connections between the source and early Mormon figures. For example, with parallel 1, Grunder notes that “a similar list from Adair was printed in a newspaper of the town in which teen-aged Brigham Young was living in 1819.” This kind of detail attempts to connect a particular Mormon figure with a source—an approach that has little meaning outside of an argument for some kind of influence. In other places, the claims aren't so subtle:

Attempts by Nat Turner and others to accomplish that very thing (including the John Murrell plot in mid-1835) —along with Mormon political difficulties in Missouri—undoubtedly combined to inspire Oliver

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36. While this certainly true—printed material is evidence of that material being in the environment in some way—it is also evident that not everything that is printed in the modern world has wide distribution or is circulating orally everywhere.

Cowdery's August 17, 1835 declaration that, . . . (2008, p. 75–76)

The American antimasonic movement which raged while Joseph Smith dictated the Book of Mormon suggests its background influence in a number of the Book's passages which describe mafia-esque intrigues of ancient American bands of robbers after the order of one Gadianton. (2008, p. 138)

Grunder looks for single sources, not widespread traditions. His focus on these individual sources looks far more like an argument for genetic dependency than claims for a shared environment. When his analysis is wrong, it is wrong because he has “missed the forest for the trees.” Grunder in many ways is a mirror image of the “apologists” that he derides: “They come at the reader,” he complains,

with wave upon wave of erudite-sounding arguments, often drawn from ancient sources with esoteric names and from phenomena which are nearly unassailable by the layperson. With each ‘hit’ presented comes a question, stated or implied. (2008, p. 24)

But Grunder presents literally thousands of pages of esoteric texts, without having to overtly provide much of his own interpretation. He tries to pull the rug out from under his “apologist” opponents by asserting frequently that it doesn't matter if this specific text was a source or not—its mere existence is evidence enough. What is the implied argument that comes with the presentation of each new parallel? There is nothing new or original within Mormonism.

We can often see direct influence from a specific source (or a group of related sources) reflected in a new text. Sometimes this is explicitly stated. My own essay here (and Grunder's work) documents in citations (or footnotes) hundreds of sourc-

es that are used and that have influenced our respective published works. While not always explicitly identified, we can often gauge with some certainty that the work one individual produces borrows from or was highly influenced by the work of another (even if we cannot always tell the direct path that the influence took).

Once we have determined the similarities, we can then identify the differences, and start to rediscover what is historically original. This is true of Joseph Smith and Rick Grunder. At the conclusion of each examination we should be able to say with some certainty if a legitimate environmental parallel exists, if that parallel rises to a level of influence or genetic connection, and make some preliminary observations on how the parallel was used and developed within the Mormon source.

## Conclusion

"Inevitably, the presentation of so much material in this study will crave conclusions about what it all means" (2008, p. 26).

What does all of it mean? It should be quite obvious that Mormonism is a real movement, coming from a real historical period and from a recognizable environment. It seems reasonable that we should see environmental influences coming from that time and place within Mormonism. I repeat, this shouldn't come as a surprise. The collection of texts in Grunder's bibliography, however, doesn't help enlighten as much as Grunder believes it should.

More than a dozen of Grunder's parallels come in texts produced by the Temperance Movement (all of them presented in comparison with the Word of Wisdom in Doctrine and Covenants Section 89). The highlight shared between this large body of literature and early Mormonism is the negative view on alcohol (strong drinks). There is a clear environmental issue, shared by both of these movements with the larger social

group to which both belong. The information we have (from the historical record) from that time period tells us that alcohol consumption in the U.S. was at record levels per capita, peaking at around 1830.<sup>37</sup> Serious health concerns directly linked to alcohol had been in circulation for the better part of a century,<sup>38</sup> and those concerns (and later similar explanations) contributed to a growing public discourse. In response to these issues, the temperance movement began to pick up speed about the same time as early Mormonism began to take form. Just one organization alone, the New York State Temperance Society, managed to distribute more than four and a half million tracts between 1829 and 1834 describing the evils of strong drinks (the entire population of the United States was at that time about thirteen million).<sup>39</sup> That this should become a topic for religion in general and in Mormonism more specifically isn't odd. If anything surprises us, it is that the Word of Wisdom doesn't engage in the language of these temperance groups, and doesn't label strong drinks as the tool of the devil. Rather it suggests that "inasmuch as any man drinketh wine or strong drink among you, behold it is not good, neither meet in the sight of your Father, only in assembling yourselves together to offer up your sacraments before him" (D&C 89:5). While we can see that there is a great deal of potential for an environmental relationship between these kinds of texts, the individual tracts from the Temperance Movement end up having very little in common with the Word of Wisdom or its later interpretation by

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37. W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 8–9.

38. Sometimes incorrectly, as the case may be. In one of the first such publications, Thomas Cadwalader had attributed the West India Dry-Gripes to drinking rum (in his essay "Essay on the West India Dry-Gripes," published by Benjamin Franklin in 1745). This was only partially true. Drinking the rum did cause the painful (sometimes fatal) maladies, but it wasn't caused by alcohol *per se*. The actual cause was lead poisoning derived from lead-lined stills used to make the rum.

39. W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic*, 196.

Mormons.<sup>40</sup> So why does Grunder feel the need to provide so many of these texts? The several examples that Grunder provides don't demonstrate to us the inevitability of the Word of Wisdom within Mormon thought—and they don't apparently cause the development in Mormon thought on the topic of alcohol consumption.

While Grunder's bibliographic work can be helpful in pointing out some of the areas in which we can look for these environmental causes, it isn't helpful in explaining them. Similarity without difference is merely identity. When we examine parallels more closely, all we find are differences. The repeated insistence that these parallels are important is really an attempt to drive home covert conclusions, and not to simply provide additional examples or possibilities. As Grunder tells us in a discussion about weights and values in the Book of Mormon:

If one were dictating from one's head during the early period of the United States, and one were thinking of silver, gold, and grain, I think the most obvious units would be the dollar and the bushel. Both were made up of repeatedly doubled units, in common folk-binary divisions. . . . If the American/Book of Mormon correlations which I have presented are not perfect, they are simplicity itself when viewed against the labored arguments offered by modern Book of Mormon defenders. I cannot say that Joseph Smith thought consciously like I propose, but I will insist that his task was easier than many people have imagined. (2008, pp. 484–46)

There is a subtext to this comment. Joseph's task in this statement can only refer to the production of the Book of

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40. It wasn't until the beginning of the twentieth century that Latter-day Saints finally enforced a ban on alcohol in ecclesiastical policy. And the ban on coffee, tea, and tobacco was never a part of the Temperance Movement agenda.

Mormon. Grunder's bibliography is not a collection of potential parallels to Mormonism taken from its earliest environment. It is a series of stealthed polemical arguments—aimed primarily at “modern Book of Mormon defenders.” As such, its value in identifying real potential sources, and even real environmental influences, is limited. What value there might be in collecting such a range of sources is diminished by the polemical nature of the work's contents (as well as by its sheer volume), the lack of availability in its sources for casual comparison, and a summary approach that misinforms more often than it illuminates. In the end, Grunder comes across as one of Tennyson's index-hunters, one of those “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.”<sup>41</sup> And the Mormonism that we discover in the pages of Grunder's book becomes ham that has lost its flavor. Mormonism isn't the hints that we can find, it is what has become of them.

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41. Tennyson, *The Works of Tennyson*, 910.



