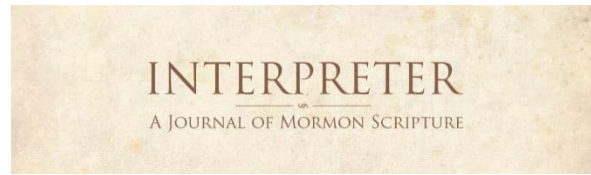




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The Book with the Unintentionally Self-Referential Title

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Brant A. Gardner

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THE BOOK WITH THE UNINTENTIONALLY SELF-REFERENTIAL TITLE

Brant A. Gardner

Review of Earl M. Wunderli, *An Imperfect Book: What the Book of Mormon Tells Us about Itself* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2013), 328pp + Appendices, Maps, and Index.

Earl M. Wunderli has written a book that works through the reasons he fell out of belief in the Book of Mormon. These are combined with issues that he has added to his original reasons. His presentation is clearly intended to suggest that what he found compelling will also be compelling to other readers. Should it? This review looks at how his arguments are constructed: his methodology, the logic of the analysis, and the way he uses his sources. Although he argues that it is the Book of Mormon that is the imperfect book, his construction of the arguments makes that designation ironic.

An *Imperfect Book* is Wunderli's footnoted untestimony of the Book of Mormon. He places it in that context with the very first sentence of his Introduction: "Like others born into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I wondered, as a young adult, whether my church — known informally as the Mormon or LDS church and headquartered in Salt Lake City — was what it claimed to be. And like many other Mormons, I eventually found my answer in the Book of Mormon" (p. 1). It is an opening sentence designed to mimic what might have

been the opening line of a book of faithful testimony.¹ The entire book may be read as Wunderli meticulously bearing that untestimony. As an intellectual autobiography it tells us about the author, but it is not really intended to be an autobiography. Wunderli presents his intellectual journey in the expectation that his readers will come to the same conclusions as he does.

It is inappropriate to review Wunderli's personal conclusions about the Book of Mormon. Everyone must approach religious belief individually, and their personal determinations ought to be respected. However, the intent that others might adopt his conclusions requires examination. How well does he present his thesis? Is there a methodological model that provides sufficient foundation for the conclusions? How well does the data examined establish his conclusions? How well grounded are his arguments in the larger literature on the subject? These are the kinds of questions I propose to examine.

Wunderli's Thesis

The subtitle of the book is: *What the Book of Mormon Tells Us about Itself*. It is in the title because it is a concept that informs his approach to the text. He believes that "the value of internal evidence is that it is accessible and verifiable by anyone. It does not change, and is fairly understandable" (p. 9).² Thus he

1 For example, the preface to Vaughn E. Hansen, *Cumoram: Great Lakes Region — Land of the Book of Mormon* (Springville, Utah: CFI, an imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc., 2011) has this first sentence: "All my life, I have cherished the record compiled and written by the prophet Mormon about AD 375. I have searched intently to understand the precious doctrine in his book and also to know where he lived" (p. xi). Also, Tom G. Rose, *Proof: How to Know the Book of Mormon is True* (Springville, Utah: CFI, an imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc., 2011) in his Introduction: "To those who have prayerfully studied it, as I have, has come a personal witness that the Book of Mormon is exactly what Joseph Smith said it is" (p. 2).

2 It is a proposition he has previously used to ground an interpretive theory about Book of Mormon geography. Earl M. Wunderli, "Critique of a Limited Geography for Book of Mormon Events," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 35 (Fall 2002): 161–62; "We can examine ... what the Book of

sets up his book as an obvious display of data from the text from which perhaps any reasonable researcher would come up with the same conclusions that he has, because the data don't change and are "fairly understandable." Unfortunately, that is a completely untenable hypothesis.

Pure coincidence had me reading E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible*,³ about the same time as I was reading Wunderli's book. So much of what I really loved in Richards and O'Brien's book explains many of the difficulties I find in Wunderli. Specifically, their entire book refutes Wunderli's hypothesis about self-explanatory data.

An important illustration of this principle comes from a story they tell of about a teacher in a Christian seminary. He asked a number of students to read the story of the prodigal son, close their Bibles, and then recount the story to another student. None mentioned the famine in Luke 15:14, which was the event that precipitated the prodigal's return. He tried the experiment with 100 people. Only six mentioned the famine. What he realized was that one thing that all of the participants had in common was that they were in the United States. He had the opportunity to perform the same experiment in St. Petersburg, Russia, where 42 of the 50 participants mentioned the famine.⁴ Famine had been a terrible reality for those interviewed in St. Petersburg. Those in the United States had never known famine. Richards and O'Brien conclude: "Based

Mormon itself says. One advantage of this approach is that this internal evidence is fixed, readily available, and easily verifiable."

3 See Brant A. Gardner, "I Do Not Think That WORD Means What You Think It Means," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 7 (2013): 49–55 for a review of Richards and O'Brien's book.

4 E. Randolph Richards and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 14.

solely on cultural location, people from America and Russia disagreed about what they considered the crucial details of the story.”⁵

Wunderli’s “internal evidence that is accessible and verifiable by anyone” was the same for both groups. What differed was the life experiences of the interpreters of the data. Those external factors could not help but influence the way the groups saw the data in the text. Richards and O’Brien explain: “We instinctively draw from our own cultural context to make sense of what we’re reading.”⁶ It is a conclusion that Wunderli also discovered: “I wanted as much as possible to deal with simple facts and what they meant. My quest has not been completely realized because judgments must be made about what the facts mean, and such judgments are not made in a vacuum” (p. 12). Only 12 pages into his book and Wunderli realizes his underlying assumption is invalid.

Nevertheless, he will conclude at the end of the book: “The contents of the Book of Mormon speak for themselves, some quite obviously, like the many curiosities or the overlong lives, and some, after careful study, become more apparent, like the common idiom used throughout the book” (p. 328). In spite of his admission that the data cannot speak for themselves, he persists in that assumption to the end of the text. I am unable to determine why he spends so much time setting up his thesis when he knew it was invalid by the time he wrote.

He creates a similar situation in the section of the introduction entitled “In Defense of Evidence.” The very title suggests that Wunderli’s will be an evidence-driven approach. He spends pages supporting his suggestion about the defenders’ preferences for faith, even invoking William James to support the idea that prayers or visions are unreliable gauges of truth. He makes the issue clear: “Critics prefer evidence and reason

5 Richards and O’Brien, p. 14.

6 Richards and O’Brien, p. 11.

over faith and prayer as the method for testing truth” (p. 3). Unfortunately for his absolute declaration, he admits that it is a false dichotomy: “Defenders examine the evidence extensively and deeply even though it remains for them secondary to a witness of the Holy Ghost” (p. 6). “In other words, both defenders and critics of the Book of Mormon rigorously engage the evidence” (p. 7). Wunderli spends most of the section creating a firm (but false) dichotomy that places himself and all other reasonable people on the side of evidence and defenders in a position where they would ignore evidence. Then he admits that defenders engage evidence “extensively and deeply.” He has spent a lot of ink setting up a position he knew, and admitted, was incorrect.

Joseph Smith, Translation, and English

The first problem any serious examination of the Book of Mormon must face is how we should read the text. That might seem trite, but it is a serious issue precisely because a major claim of the text is that it is a translation from an ancient record. Even though Wunderli clearly wrote his book from the perspective of Joseph as author rather than translator, he does understand that some discussion of what kind of a translation it was has relevance to the answers to the questions asked of the text.

Similar to his approach to the self-explanatory text and the evidence vs. prayer dichotomy, Wunderli will spend time setting up his preferred explanation of the translation and come to conclusions that he knows are not shared by the LDS scholars who have looked at the issue.

His preferred thesis is stated early: “Critics countered that if the widely accepted account of the translation process was true — that Joseph Smith would bury his head in a hat with a seer stone and dictate to his scribe the translated words as they appeared to him, which would not disappear until they

had been transcribed correctly — there was no room for *any* change, let alone changes that altered the meaning of the text” (p. 8). He elaborates in a section entitled “The Uncertain Translation.”

The section begins with statements by Martin Harris and David Whitmer, two of the three witnesses of the Book of Mormon. Each indicates that Joseph saw the words that were to be written and that there was some mechanism that would assure that the translation occurred perfectly. He bolsters that position by citing a scholar (identified as Edward H. Ashment only in the footnote): “As summarized by one scholar’s conclusion, the Book of Mormon claimed to be ‘a literal, word-for-word translation of characters from the ancient gold plates.’” (p. 35). Important to Wunderli’s thesis is his indication that the scholar’s conclusion is only what “the Book of Mormon claimed.” Wunderli is consistent in applying his assumption that the Book of Mormon clearly affirms the very positions for which he hopes to argue.

Unfortunately, what Wunderli doesn’t mention is that Edward H. Ashment doesn’t believe that the Book of Mormon was a translation and was simply offering his own interpretation of what the data meant. Rather than evidence from the Book of Mormon, he cites someone else’s opinion about the text that happens to agree with his own. His next source to bolster this idea is Grant Palmer, another author who does not believe that the Book of Mormon was a translation.

Finally, Wunderli appears to have Royal Skousen’s agreement. That would be important because it would be difficult to argue that anyone is more familiar with the text of the Book of Mormon and its variants over time than Royal Skousen: “Royal Skousen points out that the Whitmer and Harris testimonies assume ‘iron-clad control’ by God over the Book of Mormon dictation. Yet few, if any, LDS scholars today accept these versions of the process, primarily because they do

not account for all the changes in the Book of Mormon, ‘some with doctrinal import’” (pp. 36–37).

This sentence is fascinating because it appears to invoke Skousen’s agreement with the iron-clad translation hypothesis, although Wunderli knows that Skousen disagrees that it represents the way the Book of Mormon was translated.⁷ The next sentence provides the accurate statement that “few, if any, LDS scholars today accept these versions of the process.”⁸ However, Wunderli ends with an explanation of the reason why they do not: “primarily because they do not account for all the changes in the Book of Mormon.” On that point, Wunderli is less than correct. The reason is not that the hypothesis doesn’t account for the changes but rather that the data from the original and printer’s manuscripts contradict the hypothesis. Were it as Wunderli argues, one might believe that the defenders adopted their position only because they couldn’t defend the *iron-clad* theory. The fact of the matter is that it is the result of the careful examination of evidence, the method that Wunderli suggests should be used. Wunderli does not explain why Skousen’s examination of the evidence does not lead to clear and self-explanatory explanations but Wunderli’s examination of the evidence will.⁹

7 Wunderli later cites articles where Skousen has laid out his opinions. Assuming Wunderli has read the entire article, he cannot be unaware of Skousen’s opinions.

8 This sentence is footnoted, but rather than to an appropriate discussion, he cites an article by Noel B. Reynolds and Royal Skousen that doesn’t discuss the hypothesis at all, though perhaps Wunderli sees that as a conclusion to be drawn from the evidence in the article. It is possible that this is simply a misplaced reference because Wunderli does cite appropriate articles later in the book.

9 There are several sources cited in the footnote to this statement. Oddly, none of them are to Skousen’s extremely detailed explanation of the data from the manuscripts.

The first citation is to Marvin Hill, LDS historian. Hill’s article, on the page cited, tells us nothing about Hill’s ideas about the topic at all. Hill described Richard Howard’s conclusion. Howard was the RLDS Church Historian and Hill

Wunderli provides brief overviews of the other two types that Skousen mentions, *tight control* and *loose control*. He provides his opinion about the nature of *loose control* without any analysis of the way Skousen presents it or the types of evidence that might support it: “But a loose translation is barely distinguishable from composition” (p. 38). Wunderli enlists B. H. Roberts in support of that statement, but my reading of Roberts tells me that he would strongly disagree that what he suggested would be “barely distinguishable from composition.”

As a linguist, Skousen knows that the *loose translation* methodology is a legitimate method of translation that is employed by professional translators in certain circumstances.¹⁰

does specifically say that the textual evidence that he had seen did not support the Whitmer and Harris iron-clad statements. Hill indicates that Howard did not accept the iron-clad method because “Howard concluded that the texts do not support the David Whitmer, Martin Harris, and William Smith contention that Joseph received a word-by-word translation by inspiration which required none of his own conceptualization.” Marvin Hill, “The ‘New Mormon History’ Reassessed in Light of Recent Books on Joseph Smith and Mormon Origins,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 21/3 (Autumn 1988): 122. This is the page Wunderli cites.

His second citation is to Robert J. Matthews’ review of Howard’s book. Matthews reports: “Howard’s presentation of excerpts from pre-publication manuscripts seems to be ample documentary evidence to refute the David Whitmer — Martin Harris — William Smith reports that the act of translation of the Book of Mormon was a visually projected experience in which Joseph is said to have actually seen the words in the Urim and Thummim and merely copied them.” Robert J. Matthews, Review of Richard P. Howard, *Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development*, *BYU Studies*, 10, no. 2 (1970): 246. This is one of the two pages Wunderli cites.

So we have three citations that really all refer to a single source. The other two reference the source favorably. The conclusion Howard comes to is based on precisely the type of evidence that Wunderli believes should be examined. Wunderli does not explain why they came to a different conclusion based on self-explaining data.

10 I review this methodology in Brant A. Gardner, *Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 137–46. In pp. 147–56 I review the types of translations that have been used to explain how the Book of Mormon’s English text might be seen as a translation. Wunderli is aware of my book, but references it only for a quotation from Brigham Young

The professional translators would hardly see their job as one of composition. A misunderstanding of the implications of the idea of translation underlies Wunderli's examination of the meaning of certain words and phrases in the text.

Wunderli's conclusion to his discussion of the various theories of translation is that, "Indeed, composition, rather than translation at all, would account for all the facts" (p. 41). Regardless of the evidence he has presented, Wunderli proceeds under the assumption with which he began the analysis. Nothing in the section on translation provided any means of adequately judging any of the possible opinions, let alone justifying his conclusion that they don't matter at all.

Joseph as Author

Evidence about the nature of the translation is a difficult basis upon which to determine if Joseph was an author rather than a translator. Wunderli presents the evidence for his conclusion in his section entitled "Joseph Smith as Author." One of the ways to discover whether a document is a translation of an older text or a modern production is to compare it to the milieu in which it was purported to have been written. That is a complex issue for the Book of Mormon, and Wunderli has already told us that he has no expertise in that field to make such an assessment.

The closest he can come to his stated goal of letting the text speak for itself is to shift from a historical focus on the proposed time and place of authorship and examine Joseph himself. Of course, that is necessarily outside of what the text tells us about itself, so this time Wunderli implicitly shows the weakness of his original hypothesis by going away from the text and into information about Joseph Smith. Wunderli's set-up for this section is to declare: "Defenders of the Book of

that was included. For the record, while Skousen champions a *tight control* over the translation, I suggest that the data demonstrate more of a *loose control*. Both are interpretations of data rather than simple assertions.

Mormon continue to say that Joseph could not have written it” (p. 50). There are numerous arguments where that statement has been invoked, but Wunderli is really not interested in them. His foil is simply the idea that “Joseph could not have written it.” Against that simple statement, Wunderli assembles opposite opinions. His conclusion is, of course, that Joseph could have written it.

How well does he make that argument? One suggestion is that, contrary to defender claims, Joseph had sufficient imagination to create the text. He hypothesizes: “Joseph’s preparation would have included his experience telling stories to his family. His mother wrote that he was spinning tales about prehistoric Mound Builders before he was twenty” (p. 55). He then provides Mother Smith’s statement. Except she doesn’t say that Joseph spun tales about the Mound Builders at all. Why does Wunderli believe that Joseph was telling tales about the Mound Builders when his evidence doesn’t say that? Actually, it sort of did. Wunderli cites Fawn Brodie’s *No Man Knows My History* rather than any edition of Lucy Mack Smith’s recollection (p. 55). Brodie introduced the idea of the mound builders right before citing Lucy Mack Smith’s recollection.¹¹ Since Wunderli used Brodie rather than Mother Smith, he simply repeated the assertion even though there is no evidence at all that the stories recounted had anything to do with Mound Builders. Lucy Mack Smith does provide some context: “From this time forth Joseph continued to receive instructions from time to time and every evening we gathered our children together and gave our time up to the discussion of those things which he imparted to us.”¹²

11 Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 35.

12 Lucy Mack Smith, *Lucy’s Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith’s Family Memoir*, ed. Lavina Fielding Anderson (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 344 (following the 1844–45 version). The paragraph Wunderli references is two paragraphs later.

Of course one might still suspect that Joseph made up stories based on the Mound Builders, but that is an interpretation laid over the evidence, not a conclusion that flows from it. Wunderli does footnote that statement, but rather than the source, which was Brodie, he cites Terryl Givens' *By the Hand of Mormon*, p. 93. Although it is true that Givens discussed the general availability of the Mound Builder ideas, Givens described the general atmosphere ascribing the mounds to Indian ancestors, noting that it was an opinion Jefferson held. If one were to simply assume that a footnote supported the conclusion to which it is attached, one might believe that Givens endorsed Wunderli's conclusion about Joseph. Actually examining the footnote shows that Givens is talking about the subject, but certainly not supporting Wunderli's thesis.

What happens when Wunderli attempts to use the text itself to determine whether Joseph was translator or author? The first suggestion is that many sentences are "awkwardly long and rambling" (p. 57). He concludes, after a particularly egregious 392 word long sentence: "It seems more likely that Joseph Smith is the author of this monstrous sentence than the Jesus portrayed in the Bible" (p. 58). Apparently, that sentence is supposed to be self-evident, as Wunderli provides nothing more than his conclusion, which begins with "it seems more likely." Clearly it seemed more likely to Wunderli, but there are more data to consider.

The unexplained problem with Wunderli's analysis is that he lays the responsibility for this sentence at Joseph's feet. Joseph was not responsible for the way any sentence was punctuated. Neither the original nor printer's manuscripts had any punctuation. It was added by John Gilbert, the compositor for Grandin Press. Gilbert generally did an excellent job interpreting the manuscript, but his conclusions are not part of the translation and a different compositor might have made some different decisions. I can see several ways to break that

massive sentence into smaller sentences through simply adding periods and subsequent capitalization. Using choices that Gilbert made to claim that Joseph had to have been the author of the text far exceeds the evidence.

Problems with the Bible in the Book of Mormon

The second chapter (pp. 65–95) begins the examination of the data in earnest. In this chapter, Wunderli looks at the presence of language and passages in the Book of Mormon from the King James Version of the Bible. Beginning with the data, is it self-evident that we will arrive at Wunderli’s unargued conclusion: “It *seems unlikely* that Joseph Smith’s independent translation would be virtually identical to that of the King James translators who 200 years earlier rendered the book of Isaiah into early seventeenth-century English. More modern translations correct the KJV or differ from it” (italics added, pp. 68–69).

First, as with most of his conclusions, they stem from his worldview more than the data. The data say that there are passages in the Book of Mormon that appear either exactly as they do in the King James Version of the Bible or are very close to the KJV model. Wunderli believes that asserting what “seems unlikely” to him will be a sufficient explanation. That is a point where appeals to external information would save Wunderli from unwarranted assumptions. Joseph Smith isn’t the only translator of scripture who has been influenced by KJV language. Walter W. Wessel describes his personal experience as a Bible translator: “In 1967 I joined a group of scholars who were invited to participate in a translation of the Bible that ultimately became known as the New International Version (NIV). We were not far into this project before most of us, especially the older members of the group, became keenly aware of how much we had been influenced by the wording of

the King James Version. It took considerable effort and much vigilance to purge our minds of its antiquated language.”¹³

If modern, trained translators admit to the overarching influence of the KJV language, we shouldn’t be so quick to assume that Joseph as a translator should have been immune to the KJV’s influence. The opposite is surely true. Lavina Fielding Anderson asserts that KJV language informs various texts available from members of Joseph Smith’s family. These examples are important because they are not intentionally imitating the KJV language, but rather incorporating that language more naturally in their discourse. She concludes

that the Smith family’s oral culture was so thoroughly imbued with biblical language, both the Old and New Testaments, that its use was fluent, easy, and familiar. When they reached for a colorful phrase, searched for a simile, or stressed a point, the vocabulary that their minds offered readily was an appropriate and often vivid phrase from the Bible. Seldom did the context of secondary use relate to the biblical context. It also seems likely that this easy familiarity with KJV language made it possible for them to quickly adopt and incorporate images and phrasing from specifically Mormon scriptures.¹⁴

More than just the language, Wunderli suggests that the Book of Mormon imitates the Bible in overall organization: “At a macro level, the Book of Mormon resembles the Bible as a history of a people favored of God. It is divided into books

13 Walter W. Wessel, “A Translator’s Perspective on Alister McGrath’s History of the King James Version,” in Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss, Steven M. Voth, eds., *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God’s Word to the World*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 199.

14 Lavina Fielding Anderson, “Mother Tongue: KJV Language in Smith Family Discourse.” Paper read at the Mormon History Association, May 22, 2009. Copy in my possession courtesy of Anderson. 4.

named after prophets” (p. 85). This would certainly appear to be a self-evident observation. However, in stating the simple parallel Wunderli entirely ignores the ways in which the Book of Mormon’s naming system is dramatically different from the simple model he suggests. Biblical books named for the prophets are assumed to have been written by those prophets. In the Book of Mormon, the situation is much more complex, with multiple prophets writing in the same named book, and books such as Alma and Helaman being named for the second prophet of that name, not the first. There is a complex logic discernible behind the changing of book names, but it is lost in Wunderli’s simple pronouncement.¹⁵

The vast majority of the data presented in this chapter may be used to discuss how Joseph translated,¹⁶ but to use it as evidence that he did not translate at all requires the presumptive conclusion that he was the author. In this case, the interpretation precedes the evidence because it governs the evidence selected; therefore the assumption also guides the conclusion. Wunderli isn’t following the evidence, he is leading it.

Words and Phrases

Chapter 3 (pp. 97–148) is the first time that Wunderli presents his own research rather than summarized discussions that have gone on for years. The genesis of this chapter is probably as old as the process by which Wunderli gained his untestimony:

My own entry into Book of Mormon research began quite innocently. As a young lawyer, I acquired a reproduction of the first edition of the Book of

¹⁵ Brant A. Gardner, “Mormon’s Editorial Method and Meta-Message,” in *FARMS Review* 21/1 (2009): 87–90.

¹⁶ Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon*, (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 192–96, chapter 18 “Joseph’s Translations Involving Biblical Texts.”

Mormon. One issue in the air at that time was the significance of the changes in the book between the first edition and the 1920 version. Critics argued that changes discredited the book since it was supposed to have been translated by the gift and power of God. Defenders maintained that changes only corrected typographical errors or improved grammar and meant nothing. Critics countered that if the widely accepted account of the translation process was true — that Joseph Smith would bury his head in a hat with a seer stone and dictate to his scribe the translated words as they appeared to him, which would not disappear until they had been transcribed correctly — there was no room for *any* change, let alone changes that altered the meaning of the text. Defenders insisted that our knowledge of the translation process is sketchy and that the prophet who translated the book approved the changes.

With copies of the first and current edition in hand, I set out to find what the changes were and to determine whether the critics or defenders of the Book of Mormon were right. I read the current edition aloud while my wife noted each change in the first edition. When we finished, we had the facts (pp. 8–9).

Of this careful comparison of two versions of the text, he remembers: “So far as I knew, no one else had done such an analysis, and as far as I know, no one has yet” (p. 11). He doesn’t tell us when this was, but it was when he was a young lawyer and he is now retired.¹⁷ It could well have been true at the time.

¹⁷ Other than the indication that this occurred when he was a young lawyer, Wunderli doesn’t tell us when this particular analysis occurred. Whenever it was, it was apparently gathered into an early manuscript form by 1976 under the

However, it is puzzling that he adds “as far as I know, no one has yet.” Wunderli cannot have missed Royal Skousen’s meticulous work analyzing all variants from the manuscripts through all published materials, a work that covers six volumes.¹⁸ It most certainly has now been done, and to a much greater extent than Wunderli’s decades-old experience.

At the beginning of the chapter Wunderli lays out what he expects his data to show. On the one hand, “Defenders of the Book of Mormon believe the book is exactly what it purports to be, a history written by several men. . . .” (p. 97). This gives him a testable hypothesis: “If several writers contributed to the book, differences in their vocabularies should be noticeable” (p. 97). Thus the thrust of his analysis will be to show ways in which the language of the text appears to point to a single “author,” Joseph Smith. Wunderli is not recreating stylometric analyses, or even mentioning them. Stylometrics attempts to look at authorship through statistical analysis of unconscious aspects of speech that are claimed to be determinative for an author.¹⁹ It has not been a methodology that provides universally acceptable results.²⁰

title *Internal Evidence on the Origin of the Book of Mormon*. This was followed by a paper entitled “The Book of Mormon Speaks on its Own Origin” in 1979. Both of these manuscripts are housed at the University of Utah and I have not consulted them. Wunderli confirms this approximate dating for his original study by noting that he used the 1920 edition rather than the more recent 1981 edition (p. 32).

18 See Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*. THE CRITICAL TEXT OF THE BOOK OF MORMON, vol. 4, 6 parts (Provo, Utah: The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies), 2004–2009.

19 Wayne A. Larsen and Alvin C. Rencher, “Who Wrote the Book of Mormon? An Analysis of Wordprints,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, edited by Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1982): 157–88.

20 For example, the application of the technique to Isaiah has yielded different results. See L. LaMar Adams and Alvin C. Rencher, “A Computer Analysis of the Isaiah Authorship Problem,” *BYU Studies* 15, no. 1 (Autumn 1974–75): 95–102; L. LaMar Adams, “A Scientific Analysis of Isaiah Authorship,” in *Isaiah and the Prophets: Inspired Voices from the Old Testament*, edited by

Nevertheless, that isn't what Wunderli proposes at all. What he will do is present lists of words and frequencies and then suggest that they support his contention that Joseph was author rather than translator. The methodology in this particular case fails because Wunderli does not take translation into account at all. The clearest example comes from a problem he sees in the way Jesus is quoted in the Book of Mormon and in the Bible. "Looking further at Jesus's use of words, the biblical Jesus uses *exceeding* only once, and the Book of Mormon Jesus not at all" (p. 108).

Actually, the biblical Jesus never used *exceeding*. The Book of Mormon Jesus could not have used the word *exceeding*. It is an English word. Wunderli's comparisons implicitly assume that not only is English the original language of the Book of Mormon, but that English is an accurate depiction of what Jesus might actually have said. He makes this assumption even though he knows that different translators translate differently, a point he used earlier to suggest that Joseph didn't translate any section that replicates the KJV.

Unfortunately, he also appears to believe that what he reads in an English Bible can be determinative of Jesus's language patterns which were not only not English, but were unlikely to have been in Greek (the language into which they were first translated). By not accounting for issues of translation Wunderli assumes that any similarities he finds across authors points to Joseph Smith as an author. However, that very same evidence may just as easily point to the same person, Joseph Smith, as the translator. Wunderli never makes that distinction nor provides any indication that he is aware that a very simple

Monte S. Nyman (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1984):151–63; Yehuda T. Radday, *The Unity of Isaiah in the Light of Statistical Linguistics* (Hildesheim, Germany: Dr. H. A. Gerstenberg, 1973); Paul J. Fields, G. Bruce Schaalje, and Matthew Roper, "Examining a Misapplication of Nearest Shrunken Centroid Classification to Investigate Book of Mormon Authorship," *Mormon Studies Review* 23/1 (2011): 87–111.

shift in underlying assumption invalidates virtually every argument he makes in the chapter. It is a problem that Richards and O'Brien warn about: "It is important for us to remember that when we read the Bible in our native language, mostly what has been changed is the words. Behind the words, now in a language we understand, remains that complex structure of cultural values, assumptions and habits of mind that does not translate easily, if at all. If we fail to recognize this — and we very often do — we risk misreading the Bible by reading foreign assumptions into it."²¹ In this case, Wunderli misreads the Book of Mormon by reading foreign assumptions into the words themselves.

Wunderli summarizes one argument:

Embellishing the wording for passages quoting Isaiah and Jesus, like adding *behold*, has not added anything of substance to the Book of Mormon. The easiest explanation for these additions is that they came from Joseph Smith, who borrowed from the Bible to sound scriptural but wanted to add to the quotations to make them sound like an independent translation. As a summary of the evidence, the four Nephite writers cannot be distinguished from each other or from the Book of Mormon Jesus, who is clearly distinguished from the biblical Jesus. If the Book of Mormon were ancient, it seems unlikely that these words would have retained the same degree of prevalence and stylistic usage over the space of 1,000 years. In addition, because some of the words are superfluous, it seems unlikely that they would have persisted as Nephite idioms, especially if engraving them on metal plates was difficult. (p. 103)

21 Richards and O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*, 72.

There is enough here to examine the nature of the data Wunderli is consulting and the way that he uses it. First, the data are in English. That is hardly surprising. However, all of the conclusions drawn from the English text have implications for authorship if and only if we assume authorship to begin with. Wunderli suggests, “The easiest explanation for these additions is that they came from Joseph Smith” (p. 103). Frankly, it is equally easy to explain them with Joseph as the sole translator. Confirmation that this is a problem in Wunderli’s analysis comes from Richard Packham, who reviewed *An Imperfect Book* for the Association for Mormon Letters. As part of a generally favorable review, Packham notes:

I did not find his linguistic arguments convincing. They are interesting observations but hardly the basis for determining the authenticity of the Book of Mormon text. Like other critics and defenders of the Book of Mormon, Wunderli does not take into consideration the fact that both the Bible and the Book of Mormon are translations, and translations from different languages. The Bible’s original languages were Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. The language of the plates from which Smith claimed to have translated the Book of Mormon was “reformed Egyptian.” Any similarities or differences between translations of such dissimilar languages must be quite irrelevant. The similarities at most would indicate copying and the differences either careless copying or an attempt to conceal the copying. Even if the Book of Mormon were admitted to be a translation of an ancient record, the fact that sometimes the original was translated with a “therefore” and sometimes with a “wherefore” (which Wunderli seems to think is significant) says

nothing about the original, only that the translator had two choices to translate one word.²²

The Second Half of the Book

The second half of the book covers the topics “Prophecies, Curiosities, LDS Scholarly Defenses, and Political, Scientific, and Religious Ideas.” In each of these Wunderli completely abandons all suggestion that he is letting the data speak for itself. What we get is his presentation of issues in the Book of Mormon that show the issue in the light in which he desires it to be seen, and then his discussion of the inadequate response, again according to his judgment. There isn’t really any subject that he raises that hasn’t had treatment at the hands of defenders of the Book of Mormon that cast the issue in an entirely different light.

For example, Wunderli expounds:

In the Book of Mormon, Native Americans are Israelites, specifically descendants of the family of Lehi who have been cursed with a dark skin because they rebelled against the righteous Nephi. Initially they follow Nephi’s brother Laman and are called Lamanites. Nephi foresees that after the final civil war, his brother’s descendants will become “a dark, and loathsome, and a filthy people, full of idleness and all manner of abominations.” Fast-forward 1,000 years and Mormon sees the same future for the descendants of Laman as “a dark, a filthy, and

22 Richard Packham, review of *An Imperfect Book* for the Association for Mormon Letters, posted June 20, 2013, http://forums.mormonletters.org/yaf_postst1489_Wunderli-An-Imperfect-Book-What-the-Book-of-Mormon-Tells-Us-About-Itself-reviewed-by.aspx (accessed June 2014). He concludes: “On the whole, this book is a valuable addition to the many volumes written about the Book of Mormon, if only for its excellent summary of the many arguments of critics and defenders.”

a loathsome people” who, because of their “unbelief and idolatry,” are “beyond the description” of anything ever seen among the Book of Mormon peoples. (pp. 181–82)

There are several problems with this paragraph. The first is that the data are incorrect. The Book of Mormon specifically includes the descendants of Mulek (represented by the people of Zarahemla) as part of the Israelite promise. Secondly, very early we are told that Nephite and Lamanite are demonyms (names for a people) rather than patronyms (lineage names). Jacob clarifies usage that is also clearly in use in Nephi’s writing:

Now the people which were not Lamanites were Nephites; nevertheless, they were called Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Ishmaelites.

But I, Jacob, shall not hereafter distinguish them by these names, but I shall call them Lamanites that seek to destroy the people of Nephi, and those who are friendly to Nephi I shall call Nephites, or the people of Nephi, according to the reigns of the kings. (Jacob 1:13–14)

Then we come to the issue of the dark skin. Rather than examine the textual evidence for the way “skin of darkness” is used in the text, Wunderli accepts the external interpretation that it means a pigmentation change. I have made just such an internal analysis of the meaning of the phrase according to the text. I come to a very different conclusion.²³ Wunderli does obliquely examine the *skin of blackness* as a metaphor but

23 Brant A. Gardner, “What Does the Book of Mormon Mean by ‘Skin of Blackness?’” *FairMormon* <http://www.fairmormon.org/perspectives/publications/what-does-the-book-of-mormon-mean-by-skin-of-blackness>. The online article is excerpted from Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 2:108–22.

dismisses it with a single sentence: “However well-intentioned this interpretation might be, it retains a tinge of racial discrimination” (p. 184).

This dismissal doesn’t deal with the argument at all. It simply shifts the discussion away from what the text says (ironically for Wunderli’s primary thesis that one should examine data). Wunderli declares that the Book of Mormon has racial overtones. Of course, that is unacceptable in terms of our modern culture 180 years after the publication of the text. Without making it clear, Wunderli is suggesting that the failure of the text to conform to modern mores means that it was written in the 1830s rather than anciently.

Unfortunately for modern sensibilities, if we assume that the text really is ancient, then it would be highly unusual if the writers were not prejudiced. The major difference is that our modern assumptions about prejudice revolve around skin color, and those words in the text hijack our interpretations into modern assumptions. The text itself exhibits the type of ancient prejudice that we see virtually universally. Anyone not part of one’s people were not considered to be as good. In many cases, they were *barbarians*, the term the Greeks used for non-Greeks. Prejudice existed, but was based on something other than pigmentation. Similarly in the Book of Mormon, the prejudice covers out-groups. Once any outsider, any Lamanite, became “Nephite,” he or she were accepted. Although much of that understanding does require an understanding of history and anthropology, the primary data to which it is applied for the Book of Mormon is precisely the kind that Wunderli suggests that he wants to examine. In this case, he ignores it entirely.

The Great and Abominable Church receives the same assumptive treatment. Wunderli begins: “There is even harsher invective in store in the Book of Mormon for Catholics, who are characterized as members of a ‘great and abominable church.’”

It is true that the first edition of Bruce R. McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine* had that assertion. It is also true that he was required by superiors in the Church to change it (which Wunderli acknowledges on p. 189).

Wunderli notes that there isn't universal agreement on that reading, but comments: "Some writers deny the original intent of the Book of Mormon, possibly more from a sense of civility than real conviction" (pp. 189–90). Aside from his implied ability to read minds,²⁴ Wunderli continues to prejudice his readers' interpretation by suggesting that the Catholic Church is "the original intent of the Book of Mormon," this in spite of his acknowledgement that leaders of the church corrected that misunderstanding in McConkie's book.

This type of argumentation continues in the section on "Curiosities." Wunderli exposes what he believes to be an unbelievable situation: "The people who gather to hear Benjamin's sermon cry aloud 'with one voice' for mercy, declaring their belief in this Savior. Benjamin expands on the means to salvation, and the people cry again 'with one voice' saying they believe in god and will covenant to obey him. What is remarkable about this is that everyone speaks 'with one voice' but not in a short exclamation: rather, they go on for about fifty words in one instance and almost 200 words in another" (p. 200).

Wunderli's criticism of this event is essentially that he cannot understand it. His decision to avoid external evidence kept him from understanding, not anything inherent in the text. Historian Ramsay MacMullen describes multiple occasions of what he calls "lung power" operating in large public settings. Specifically, he notes that there would be a leader who would

²⁴ I have written on the topic and can confirm that his description does not at all represent my reasons for the reading I give the text. See Gardner, *Second Witness*, 1:228–31.

pronounce the phrase the group would repeat in unison.²⁵ Thus there were many occasions in the ancient world where people spoke with one voice — although it was a coached voice. There is no reason to assume that it would have been different in the Book of Mormon. There is no reason to assume that an ancient writer would have thought the process unusual and therefore in need of explanation.

When Wunderli attempts to interpret the Book of Mormon against historical evidence, he gets it wrong. One of the curiosities: “During an ensuing battle, an intrepid Nephite charges the general and takes off “his scalp” with a sword, the scalp falling “to the earth.” It is, of course, an Indian scalping. It is doubtful Joseph Smith would have known what Professor Ludlow offered, that scalping was actually invented by the British” (pp. 210–11). There are two problems with Wunderli’s presentation of this curiosity. The first is that it really doesn’t describe scalping as was practiced by the British or American Indians. Those were scalps taken to show dominance and, at least in the case of the British, to show a count. None of those aspects appear in the Book of Mormon account. The second problem is even greater. Scalping was much older than the American colonies or even the British as a nation. Historian David Drew describes ways that Mesoamerican victims were treated: “men could be disemboweled, scalped, burnt, strapped to wooden scaffolds and shot with arrows.”²⁶ If Wunderli is going to allow an appeal to history, there is a perfectly acceptable history in what many LDS scholars believe was the right place, and the right time.

Wunderli finds it a curiosity that “when Jesus appears, he invites the multitude to thrust their hands into the sword

25 Ramsay MacMullen, *Voting About God in Early Church Councils* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 12–16.

26 David Drew, *The Lost Chronicles of the Maya Kings* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 313.

wound and in his side and feel the nail holes in his hands and feet. How Nephites would know the significance of the wounds is a question” (p. 217). It is true that they would not understand that Christ had been crucified, but that wasn’t the reason for the exercise. The point was that the very living Messiah before them had *died* and yet lived. If we place the event in the appropriate time in Mesoamerica, they would understand the wounds in the palms and feet as some form of humiliating torture — though not one that they practiced. However, the spear injury in the side they would recognize as fatal. A Mesoamerican population would have had knowledge of deadly wounds. Mark Wright has noted the difference between Christ’s presentation of his wounds in the New and Old World. In the New, “He bid them first to thrust their hands into his side, and secondarily to feel the prints in his hands and feet (3 Nephi 11:14). This contrasts with his appearance to his apostles in Jerusalem after his resurrection. Among them, he invited them to touch his hands and his feet (Luke 24:39-40).”²⁷ The point of Christ’s appearance wasn’t crucifixion but resurrection. In the Old World they knew he had died, and Christ had to demonstrate that the Christ who appeared was the very one who had died. In the New World they could see that he was alive. He had descended from the heavens. There was no question but that he was their Messiah. What they needed to know was that he had been dead and had resurrected (a concept with which Mesoamericans were familiar in their pagan religions).²⁸ That Wunderli does not understand an event

27 Mark Alan Wright, “Axes Mundi: A Comparative Analysis of Nephite and Mesoamerican temple and Ritual Complexes,” 7. Author’s draft of the paper read at the Temple on Mount Zion Symposium, September 22, 2012. Used with permission.

28 Mary Miller and Karl Taube, *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 108–109. The Mesoamerican maize god spans multiple cultures and virtually the entire timespan of Mesoamerican civilization. The essential element is the dying

in the Book of Mormon does not create evidence that it is a “curiosity.”

Wunderli includes a critique of the Limited Geography Theory, which is the theory most often accepted among LDS scholars with training in anthropology or archaeology. Wunderli greatly abbreviates arguments he made against that geographic setting for the Book of Mormon in an earlier article in *Dialogue*.²⁹ I have responded to the points in that article and will not cover those points again.³⁰

As with other issues, my interest in this review isn't the point and counterpoint, but the examination of the methodology Wunderli employs to arrive at his conclusions. As part of his introduction to this section he states: “John Sorenson's interest has been in locating where the Book of Mormon events might have taken place. One might think this search would rely on external evidence, but in fact it relies on clues within the text and comes a result of the fact that the traditional hemispheric geography has found little or no support in the archaeological, biological, and linguistic records” (pp. 254–55).

That Sorenson should base his analysis on internal evidence ought to be praised in Wunderli's methodological scheme. Instead, Wunderli implies that Sorenson should have relied on external evidence. In fact, Wunderli will note: “We should keep in mind that there is not a country, city, sea, or other geographical or political designation we would recognize in the Book of Mormon, outside of a few references to biblical sites” (p. 238). Wunderli remarkably suggests that external evidence might be valuable. Without noting my specific disagreements

and rising of the god, paralleling the planting of the corn seed and its subsequent growth from the “dead” seed.

29 Earl M. Wunderli, “Critique of a Limited Geography for Book of Mormon Events,” *Dialogue* 35/3 (2002): 161–97.

30 Brant A. Gardner, “An Exploration in Critical Methodology: Critiquing a Critique,” *FARMS Review* 16/2(2004): 173–223. There is no indication in *An Imperfect Book* that Wunderli has seen that review.

with his generalization, it is the fascinating paradox of his methodology that I find most interesting.

Wunderli also tells us why Sorenson does not provide that external evidence. The reason is that “traditional hemispheric geography has found little or no support.” This is a problematic statement. First, it is entirely untrue that Sorenson does not use external evidence. It is true that the initial construction of the relationships of cities and events comes from the text, but Sorenson adds to that a correlation to the real world at the appropriate time and presents external information to bolster his assertion about where the text took place.³¹

The next problem comes with the way Wunderli supports this statement. One reference in the footnotes is to Simon G. Southerton’s *Losing a Lost Tribe: Native Americans, DNA, and the Mormon Church*. This is to support the lack of biological support for the hemispheric hypothesis. What Wunderli does not tell his readers is that the majority of LDS scholars currently defending the Book of Mormon agree that there was no hemispheric location and that DNA evidence would preclude the assumption that all Amerindians descended from Book of Mormon peoples. This is a much more widely discussed topic than the quick relegation in an unexplained footnote can cover. Without more background there is no way a reader would be able to assess this statement in spite of the fact that Wunderli can marshal someone in support of it.

More difficult is the citation he uses to demonstrate that there is no archaeological evidence. He cites Raymond T. Matheny, a retired archaeologist from Brigham Young University. Matheny gave a presentation at a Sunstone Symposium in

³¹ See John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City and Provo: Deseret Book and the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1985); and John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013).

1984, and it is that presentation that Wunderli references. That would appear to be a serious condemnation, if a believing LDS scholar undermined the archaeological compatibility of the Book of Mormon with the real world. Wunderli clearly doesn't know the backstory for that presentation. William J. Hamblin provides the text of a letter that Matheny wrote:

In 1984 I was asked by Sunstone to give a talk, which I refused. They persisted by calling and asked if I would be willing to sit on a panel and comment on papers that would be given on archaeology at the upcoming symposium. To this request I consented. However, when I arrived for the symposium, much to my surprise I was listed as a speaker. I objected and said that I had not prepared a paper. The Sunstone people then handed me a card with a question on it and asked if I would comment on the question. The question dealt with how does a non-Mormon archaeologist evaluate the Book of Mormon in terms of its cultural content and claims. My answer to the question was an *ad hoc* response where I tried to put myself in a non-Mormon's professional shoes and talked about the nature of the problems that the Book of Mormon poses for the archaeologist.³²

Importantly, Wunderli does not engage the internal evidence. He even agrees: "For our purposes, we can agree with Sorenson's finding that the Nephite history takes place mostly within a relatively confined area south of the narrow neck" (p. 258). In other words, Wunderli is willing to concede that Sorenson works with internal evidence and has generally

³² Ray T. Matheny, Letter dated 18 November 1992, as quoted in William J. Hamblin, "Basic Methodological Problems with the Anti-Mormon Approach to the Geography and Archaeology of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2, no. 1 (1993): 190.

interpreted it correctly. What is wrong with Sorenson's analysis then? Wunderli tells us: "The issue is not whether most of the Nephite history takes place within a limited geographical area but whether the rest of the western hemisphere is presented as standing empty until the expansion at the end of the book and the Lamanite possession thereafter. The internal evidence favors a hemispheric model and poses severe challenges for the proponent of any limited-geography model" (p. 259).

After admitting that Sorenson's work is based on internal evidence, Wunderli criticizes Sorenson's conclusions with two statements, neither of which have been given any support whatsoever in Wunderli's book. He simply asserts that there is a problem with a land standing empty (with which Sorenson — and others — thoroughly disagree) and that the "internal evidence favors a hemispheric model." That is precisely the evidence Sorenson used, and Wunderli accepted, that did not favor the hemispheric model. Sorenson's geography of Book of Mormon events places all events in a distance perhaps no more than 600 miles long at the longest, absolutely precluding a hemispheric reading. Somehow, Wunderli expects his readers to dismiss Sorenson solely on Wunderli's unsupported statement about what the text requires — a statement that stands in opposition to Sorenson's supported internal evidence of what the text requires.

Fading to Black

Of course there is much more in the book, and virtually every point has a counterpoint other than the one(s) that Wunderli offers. The responses would be in such a similar vein to those I have already looked at. This review would have been book-length to examine every claim Wunderli makes. He asks some questions that, although they have been discussed, remain topics of debate. He notes the presence of Deutero-Isaiah in the Book of Mormon (pp. 79–83). Wunderli has nothing new

to add to the discussion and is simply reviewing the literature from his perspective. There are some life spans in the Book of Mormon that are difficult to reconcile (pp. 199–200). Wunderli is certainly not the first to notice them. It is true that there is much about the content of the Book of Mormon that is still the subject of active scholarly debate.

Has Wunderli added to the scholarly discussion? He has proposed an interpretive thesis that scholars of texts know to be wrong and which even Wunderli admits cannot be used as he intended it. Nevertheless he continues to use that interpretive methodology throughout the book. Hypotheses that are built upon incorrect theses are rarely useful.

Wunderli has not shown himself to be an impartial judge of evidence. When presenting evidence contrary to his accepted position he often presents only part of the range of LDS scholarly interpretations, assiduously avoiding those that most directly contradict his position. At least in some of the footnotes I checked, the citations did not support the point he was making.

He is willing to cite LDS authors but spends more time on sections where they agree with the proposal Wunderli wants to establish, and then he ignores the very same article when it contradicts his position. The most significant of these is when he uses an article by Richard L. Bushman to bolster his premise that Joseph used his patriotism as an underlying platform for the way in which king Mosiah shifted the political scene. Bushman's entire point in the article was that while he originally believed he could show how the Book of Mormon fit as a Republican document, he found (based on evidence!) that it was a very different book. Wunderli does nod to that conclusion: "Several LDS scholars have challenged critics for contending that Joseph Smith copied the American system of government, and have gone out of their way to find differences

between it and the Nephite government. For example, the chief judge behaves more like a king than a president” (p. 283).

Rather than “going out of his way,” Bushman indicates that his conclusions are based on internal evidence, which should be the kind of internal evidence Wunderli believes is fixed and evident. Bushman concludes:

Scholars confine themselves unnecessarily in deriving all their insight from the maxim that Joseph Smith’s writings can best be explained “by his responsiveness to the provincial opinions of this time.” That principle of criticism obscures the Book of Mormon, as it would any major work read exclusively in that light. It is particularly misleading when so many of the powerful intellectual influences operating on Joseph Smith failed to touch the Book of Mormon, among them the most common American attitudes toward a revolution, monarchy, and the limitations on power. The Book of Mormon is not a conventional American book. Too much Americana is missing. Understanding the work requires a more complex and sensitive analysis than has been afforded it. Historians will take a long step forward when they free themselves from the compulsion to connect all they find with Joseph Smith’s America and try instead to understand the ancient patterns deep in the grain of the book.³³

By setting up the hypothesis that he was dealing only with internal evidence, Wunderli can ignore the large body of work LDS scholars have amassed setting the Book of Mormon in a historical context. Convincing or not, it is not entered into the equation. His initial reason was: “I felt unable to rely

³³ Richard L. Bushman, “The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution,” *BYU Studies* 17, no. 1 (Autumn 1976): 20.

on historians, archaeologists, linguists, or others for sure knowledge about the Book of Mormon and turned to the book itself for what it could reveal about itself” (p. 10). However, he is comfortable with those experts in the second half of his book. Nevertheless, he still does not engage the evidence that many LDS scholars would indicate to be some of the stronger evidence in favor of the Book of Mormon as the translation of an ancient text.

Historian G. J. Renier quoted the French historian Fustel de Coulanges as saying, “If we approach a text with a preconceived idea we shall read in it only what we want to read.”³⁴ However openly Wunderli made his first incursion into these questions, this book is clearly written from so strongly a preconceived idea that he doesn’t even notice that he has seen only what he wanted to see as he selected what to examine and how to examine and present it.

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34 G. J. Renier, *History: Its Purpose and Method* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965), 219. John Gee says the same thing in the context of Book of Mormon research, John Gee, “La Trahison des Clercs: On the Language and Translation of the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Review of Books*, 6, no. 1 (1994): 54, “As anyone who has studied geometry since Nikolas Lobatchewsky knows, the entire shape of your geometrical system depends on your assumptions. So, too, with Book of Mormon scholarship: the shape of the resultant system depends upon the assumptions brought to bear on the text.”

