

One Face of the Hero: In Search of the Mythological Joseph Smith

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IN THE SPRING OF 1985 I RECEIVED a telephone call from my local stake high councilor requesting that I give a talk to the Stake Aaronic Priesthood around a campfire at an annual stake camping trip. He wanted me to talk about Joseph Smith or the restoration of the priesthood. I accepted. At the time I was reading Richard Bushman's *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* with great interest and a heightened sense of the adventure of the Smith family in bringing forth the Book of Mormon.

I soon discovered that a campfire surrounded by twelve-to-eighteen-year-old boys was not the place for profound statements about the doctrines of the priesthood or the achievements of Joseph Smith. Rather I realized that adventure stories from Joseph's life held the attention of these young men in the midst of hooting owls, a blazing fire, and thoughts of nighttime escapades.

While standing in front of a crackling fire, I told many tales, including the discovery of the golden plates, the escape from Liberty Jail, and the shootout at the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum. To my amazement these stories became magical spells holding the gaze of all present. I felt somehow during this ritual of storytelling that we became one organism much the same way a congregation may feel spiritual oneness during a church conference while standing in unison singing "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet." Instead of producing a "near-death experience" for the Stake Aaronic Priesthood, youth as well as their leaders, by talking theology, a "near-life experience" occurred when I told stories.

That these stories had such a life-affirming effect should not have surprised me. I remember as a Mormon youth preferring story over theology. I also remember as a missionary receiving a group letter from my home ward Primary; one little girl told me to "Be sure and bring

home some good missionary stories." That telling such stories is what Mormonism at its heart may be—and should be—is further evidenced by recent papers given at Sunstone symposia: Richard Bushman's "The Stories of Our Lives: Narrative and Belief In Mormondom" (Washington, D.C., 1990) and Eugene England's "Book of Mormon Conversion Narratives, or Why We Should Stop Doing Theology and Tell Each Other Stories" (Salt Lake City, 1990). My purpose in this essay is to suggest one of many possible approaches to Joseph Smith and Mormonism, namely, Joseph as a faith-story Hero and as disseminator of Hero faith-stories. I rely on Joseph Campbell's popular Jungian Hero model from *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*¹ with slight modifications.²

When I use the term "faith-story,"³ I refer to the term "myth." When once asked whether a myth is a lie, Joseph Campbell replied that a myth is a metaphor.⁴ He explained that myth functions as a metaphor because myths are told, believed, and lived not because of their historical veracity, but because of their poetic power to reconcile us to the mysteries of existence and awaken our own inner spiritual potential. They accomplish this by explaining transcendent truths—difficult to articulate—in the form of a story and/or a ritual which is not only easy to articulate, but which explains the ineffable through tangible symbols.⁵ Therefore, exploring the mythological Joseph Smith has nothing to do with proving or disproving the actual events of his historical life. Rather it has to do with exploring the stories told about him and by him and their use and

1. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949), hereafter *Thousand Faces*.

2. Campbell's approach is being closely examined in part because of the controversial nature of his interdisciplinary methods and conclusions. See, for instance, Daniel C. Noel, ed., *Paths to the Power of Myth* (New York: Crossroad, 1990). Other approaches to Hero myths include the Freudian approach exemplified by Otto Rank in *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, trans. F. Robbins and Smith Ely Jelliffe (New York: Journal of Mental Disease Publishing, 1914), and a myth-ritualist approach exemplified by Lord Raglan, *The Hero* (London: Methuen, 1936), both of which have been reprinted (Raglan's work only partially) in Robert A. Segal, ed., *In Quest of the Hero* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

3. Suggested by C. Robert Mesle, "Scripture, History and Myth," *Sunstone* 4 (Mar.-Apr. 1979): 49-50.

4. Joseph Campbell, in Phil Cousineau, ed., *The Hero's Journey: The World of Joseph Campbell* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), 134-36, hereafter *Hero's Journey*.

5. This concept can be found in virtually all of Campbell's works. See, for instance, Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 31, 55. Of course, other definitions of "myth" work as well and as poorly. Mircea Eliade, Otto Rank, Ernst Cassirer, Giorgio de Santillana, Hertha von Dechend, Claude Levi-Strauss, Robert Graves, Hugh Nibley, Lord Raglan, James Frazer, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Victor Turner, among others, have given varying definitions to "myth" and have different theories on the origin and function of myth.

meanings. That Joseph is an actual historical figure should not detract from the power of the myths he lived and those told about him any more than Abraham Lincoln's or John Kennedy's historical reality detracts from the myths they lived and which were created from their lives.⁶ I acknowledge the contributions regarding myth previously made by students of Mormon thought and history⁷ and hope that my comments may further efforts to understand and appreciate the power of myth in our shared religious tradition.

Before looking at the Joseph Smith story and Mormonism as Hero myths, it is necessary to set forth the elements contained in the Campbell model of the Hero myth.

THE HERO MODEL

Campbell summarizes the elements of the Hero myth as follows:

6. See, for example, Morton T. Kelsey, *Myth, History and Faith* (New York: Paulist Press, 1974), 14-34. The obvious problem with myths about historical figures is that new historical findings may undermine their mythic stature, as evidenced by the recent findings of plagiarism in Martin Luther King's doctoral dissertation. However, such an effect reveals the concerns of Joseph Campbell that myths not be viewed as history lest they lose their life (see *Thousand Faces*, 249.) New historical findings which may seem unsavory from a doctrinal point of view, such as the folk magic activities of the Smith family, may nevertheless yield a more fruitful field of mythic understanding, as I attempt to demonstrate in this essay. Mormon treatments of the Smith family folk magic have focused on presenting these incidents in a theologically acceptable way for twentieth-century Mormons by minimizing their effect on the origins of Mormonism or by explaining them as mere context. As discussed later in this essay, T. L. Brink, a non-Mormon, has suggested that Joseph's interest in treasure digging should be seen as a positive step in his development as a prophet and search for spiritual perfection. See T. L. Brink, "Joseph Smith: The Verdict of Depth Psychology," *Journal of Mormon History* 3 (1976): 73-83. See also Ronald W. Walker, "The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," *Brigham Young University Studies* 24 (Fall 1984): 429-59; Ronald W. Walker, "Joseph Smith: The Palmyra Seer," *Brigham Young University Studies* 24 (Fall 1984): 461-72; Marvin S. Hill, "Money-Digging Folklore and the Beginnings of Mormonism: An Interpretive Suggestion," *Brigham Young University Studies* 24 (Fall 1984): 473-88; Richard Lloyd Anderson, "The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching," *Brigham Young University Studies* 24 (Fall 1984): 489-560; Bushman, *Beginnings*, 69-78; D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987).

7. Mythological treatments of Joseph Smith's experiences and Mormonism in general have been suggested by Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Brink, "Depth Psychology," 73-83; James E. Faulconer, "Scripture, History and Myth," *Sunstone* 4 (Mar.-Apr. 1979): 49-50; C. Robert Mesle, "History, Faith and Myth," *Sunstone* 7 (Nov.-Dec. 1982): 10-13; Lawrence Foster, "First Visions," *Sunstone* 8 (Sept.-Oct. 1983): 39-43; and Clifton Jolley, "The Martyrdom of Joseph Smith: An Archetypal Study," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 44 (Fall 1976): 329-50.

The standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation—initiation—return. . . . The mythological hero, setting forth from his commonday hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark (brother-battle, dragon-battle; offering, charm), or be slain by the opponent and descend in death (dismemberment, crucifixion). Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be represented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world (sacred marriage), his recognition by the father-creator (father atonement), his own divinization (apotheosis), or again—if the powers have remained unfriendly to him—his theft of the boon he came to gain (bride-theft, fire-theft); intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being (illumination, transfiguration, freedom). The final work is that of the return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection (emissary); if not, he flees and is pursued (transformation flight, obstacle flight). At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir).⁸

According to Campbell, the Hero myth awakens in listeners the untapped powers of the unconscious. The Hero represents everyone in his or her individual quest for personal identity and happiness. The Hero may in fact be an actual explorer who discovers a new world or a legendary character who discovers an imaginary world. For Campbell heroes symbolically discover the inner world of their own psyche and invite listeners to follow their own call to adventure. The Hero's call is a call to leave the ordinary world to seek an authentic life. The trials are our inner fears of self-discovery. The boon recovered is the wholeness of our soul. Our return to the ordinary world with a self-actuated soul inspires others to make their own journey.

THE COMING FORTH OF THE BOOK OF MORMON

The version of the story early Mormons told of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon as reconstructed by D. Michael Quinn and others⁹ works

8. Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 30, 246.

9. Unless stated otherwise, all reconstructions of the story of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon are based on Quinn's *Magic World View*, 112-49. Although his work is

as a powerful myth of the Hero's journey, calling each listener on his and her own spiritual adventure. I rely on Quinn's reconstructed version for this reason, as well as because it is probably more accurate history in most respects. Current trends in the LDS church to de-emphasize Joseph Smith¹⁰ may reflect the inability of a de-mythologized Joseph Smith story to inspire¹¹ as much as reflect our attempts to placate criticisms of "Joseph worship." Lest my essay be construed as "Joseph worship," let me say that emphasizing the Joseph Smith story for its mythic qualities does not necessarily present a deified view of Joseph, nor does it replace the worship of Jesus Christ.

SEPARATION

The Call to Adventure

According to the Campbell Hero model, all heroes face a moment of awesome portent in which they realize the signs of their vocation as Hero in a call to adventure. The call to adventure for the coming forth of the Book of Mormon is the visitation of Moroni to Joseph. On Sunday night, 21 September 1823, apparently after an unsuccessful attempt at treasure digging, Joseph prayed in his room with the express purpose to communicate with a divine messenger, perhaps using his seer stone and the Smith family magic amulets and parchments in connection with his prayer. His major concern seemed to have been to obtain forgiveness of sins, perhaps so that he might once again meet the purity standards required of a seer and thereby obtain success with another attempt to find treasure.

Joseph's room filled with light revealing the presence of a divine being who referred to himself as Moroni. Moroni's message, delivered three times that evening, was that Joseph had been called of God to undertake a

speculative, Quinn's reconstruction of *how the early stories* about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon *were told* (as opposed to what actually happened) are substantiated by early sources friendly to the church. Bushman argues convincingly that an accurate reconstruction of *how events* relating to the coming forth of Book of Mormon *actually occurred* is difficult. See Bushman, *Beginnings*, 70.

10. See, for instance, how this trend is reflected in Dallin H. Oaks, "Witnesses of Christ," *Ensign* 20 (Nov. 1990): 29-32.

11. See Campbell's discussion of the death of myth when viewed solely as biography in *Thousand Faces*, 249. Ironically, accounts told to early converts by Joseph Smith (see Dean C. Jessee, ed., "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," *Brigham Young University Studies* 17 [Fall 1976]: 29-39) contained details of treasure digging and folk magic in the story of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon whereas later versions by him ignored those elements or admitted them defensively. See, for example, Richard Van Wagoner and Steve Walker, "Joseph Smith: 'The Gift of Seeing,'" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15 (Summer 1982): 48-68.

task of tremendous importance such that his name would be had for good and ill among all nations of the earth. Joseph was called to retrieve a set of golden plates from a hill known as Cumorah¹² near his home and translate the record for the benefit of humankind. Supernatural aids were hidden with the plates to help Joseph complete the ordeal of translation. He was told he would be tempted by his own indigent circumstances and past experience to obtain the treasure for his own gain, but that he was to withstand this temptation and follow all instructions given him to obtain the plates. In vision, Joseph saw the exact spot where the plates lay in the hill.

Supernatural Aid

Heroes typically find that the gods provide them with certain unsuspected supernatural aids to assist them in their adventure. The supernatural aids given to Joseph in the pursuit of the golden plates and its translation may have been the Smith family amulets and parchments, the seer stone he had previously found while digging for a neighbor's well, and the interpreters found with the plates. The seer stone had enabled Joseph to venture forward in his vocation as neighborhood seer and treasure hunter and thereby aided him in his quest for the golden plates.

Threshold of Adventure

The day after Moroni's visit, Joseph went to the forested hill Cumorah he had seen in a vision and found, with the help of his seer stone, the spot where the plates were buried under a stone. Both the forest and mountains/hills are appropriate adventure encounter realms and are consistently used for that purpose in myth, according to Campbell.¹³ The dark depths of forests and visionary heights of mountains and hills provide a glimpse of the risky path of the Hero into forbidden areas of the psyche and the potential vision acquired after such a quest.¹⁴

12. Whether Joseph called the hill "Cumorah" has been much discussed. See William J. Hamblin's arguments that Joseph did not identify the hill with Cumorah in "An Apologist for the Critics: Brent Lee Metcalfe's Assumptions and Methodologies" in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6 (1994), 1:476-80. David Whitmer's testimony, however, is clear that both he, Joseph, and Oliver Cowdery met Moroni on the road to Fayette where Moroni said he was "going to Cumorah" in the direction of the hill where the plates were found. See the interviews cited by Milton V. Backman, Jr., in *Eye-Witness Accounts of the Restoration* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1986), 120.

13. See, for instance, Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 43; Campbell, *Hero's Journey*, 11-12.

14. Campbell, *Hero's Journey*, 8-12.

INITIATION

Road of Trials

Upon finding the location of the plates, Joseph likely drew a magic circle around the stone with the ceremonial Smith family dagger and consulted his amulets and parchments. With a long branch Joseph lifted the stone to find the golden plates glistening in a stone box along with the interpreters (Urim and Thummim), a large breastplate, the sword of Laban, and the Liahona—the holy relics of ancient Nephite kings. Joseph's astonishment was matched only by his fear at actually uncovering such a treasure. He reached for the plates three times but was unable to grasp them. He cried out, "Why can't I obtain this book?" Joseph had heard of the enchantment which guarded such treasures but was surprised at his inability to remove the plates. Moroni appeared suddenly from the stone box, perhaps appearing from the form of a toad or some other amphibian,¹⁵ and shocked or struck Joseph, rebuking him for desiring the plates for riches and for failing to keep God's commandments.¹⁶ Campbell's comparative mythological and dream motif analysis indicate that the toad/dragon symbol may in fact represent Joseph's encounter with the fearful guardians of his own psychic recesses and that the golden plates as a symbol may in fact represent Joseph's own soul potentialities which can only be obtained after surviving heroic trials.¹⁷ Moroni also assumes a dual role of guardian presence in this story and mentor figure in successive visits to the hill.

Moroni indicated that Joseph could try to obtain the plates the same date the next year if he brought his brother Alvin with him. Joseph had failed his first trial to overcome greed, but anxiously awaited his next opportunity.

Joseph's family believed his story and took great interest in his adventure. Joseph's former treasure-hunting partners (Moroni had told Joseph

15. That the so-called "Salamander Letter" is a Mark Hofmann forgery does not change the detail of the amphibian as shown by Quinn, *Magic World View*, 128n5.

16. Other accounts indicate that Joseph was able to lift the plates from the stone box, but that after placing them to the side of the box, he looked into the box for additional treasure and found that the plates had disappeared. Moroni told him then that because he had disobeyed the commandment to not lay down the plates and because of his greed, the plates would not be delivered to him and he would have to wait another year to receive them. Quinn, *Magic World View*, 123-24.

17. See Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 51-53. Others have also indicated that the golden plates and the Book of Mormon both may represent spiritual ideals as mere objects, regardless of the reality, content, or historicity of the text. See, for instance, A. Bruce Lindgren, "Sign or Scripture: Approaches to The Book of Mormon," in Dan Vogel, ed., *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990)

to leave their employ) and some of his neighbors also believed his story. His older brother Alvin was especially anxious about the plates because of the role he might play in obtaining them. Two months later, however, Alvin died. His last words were to Joseph: "Do everything that lies in your power to obtain the Record. Be faithful in receiving instruction, and in keeping every commandment that is given you. Your brother Alvin must leave you." Alvin's loss was great because of the love the Smiths felt for him as well as the fear that Joseph, without Alvin, would not be able to pass the tests to get the plates. Joseph did not know what to do.

The next year, on 22 September 1824, Joseph returned to the hill alone. Rumors had been circulating that either the Smiths or their former treasure-hunting partners had exhumed Alvin's remains to fulfill the requirement that Alvin be present at the next meeting with Moroni; Joseph Sr. had printed newspaper notices in an attempt to dispel that rumor and eventually opened Alvin's grave to disprove it. Moroni asked Joseph at this 1824 meeting where Alvin was. Joseph replied that Alvin was dead. Moroni then said Joseph could have the plates if he brought the right person with him next time. Joseph asked, "Who is the right person?" Moroni said, "You will know."

On or before 22 September 1825 Joseph again attempted to get the plates by bringing a former treasure-digging partner named Samuel Lawrence. Joseph took Lawrence to the hill and determined that Lawrence was not the right person and apparently failed to visit with Moroni or obtain the plates.

The following year, on 22 September 1826, Joseph visited the hill again and Moroni told him that he had only one more chance to get the plates: he must keep the commandments and get married. Joseph looked in his seer stone and discovered that Emma Hale was the woman he was to marry and bring with him to get the plates the next year.

Meeting the Goddess

After many trials the Hero is faced with an ultimate challenge which, if resulting in triumph, enables him to return with a boon to restore the world. The ultimate challenge may take many forms, and most often results in a sacred marriage with the goddess-mother of the world, or atonement with the father-creator, or the exaltation and divinization of the Hero himself.

For Joseph's adventure of the discovery of the Book of Mormon, his triumph could be viewed as the sacred marriage, which also takes the mythic form of bride-theft. Joseph met Emma after moving to Pennsylvania to work with Josiah Stool's treasure-hunting partnership and the couple fell in love. Emma's father knew of Joseph's treasure-digging activities and strongly disapproved of Emma's seeing him. Joseph had turned to his

treasure-digging associates to help him win Hale's approval, but met no success. For love and to fulfill Moroni's requirement, Joseph eloped with Emma in January 1827, risking the alienation of her parents.

Campbell has attempted to show in many myths that the sacred marriage may represent the coming to knowledge of the Hero of all things that can be known, and may be associated with the discovery of gold or other wealth.¹⁸

Retrieval of the Ultimate Boon

Joseph and Emma "borrowed" Joseph Knight's wagon early on the morning of 22 September 1827 and drove to the hill. Emma stayed and prayed as Joseph climbed Cumorah and retrieved the plates. Details of this final, successful visit with Moroni are non-existent, but Joseph returned with the plates and published them to the world as the most correct book on earth with the express purpose to bring Jew, Indian, and gentile to Jesus Christ, to resolve contemporary gospel doctrine disputes, and to explain the mystery of the ruins of a once great people who anciently inhabited the Americas.

Return

Although specifics of the last interview with Moroni are not available, details of Joseph's return with the plates indicate the further trials he had to overcome as Hero to bring the boon of the Book of Mormon to the world. One version indicates that as he ran through the forest evil spirits tried to stop him, lashing him with tree limbs in a storm. Subsequent stories which took place during the translation process of hiding the plates from inquisitive neighbors—actually former treasure-hunting partners looking for their share in the find of the golden plates treasure—are equally as adventurous, as well as the trials of the dictation of the text and its final printing. But since these stories are generally familiar to Mormons and of less mythic appeal, I will not repeat them.

MYTHICAL APPLICATION OF THE BOOK OF MORMON STORY

Non-Mormon psychologist T. L. Brink has discussed aspects of the connection of Joseph's treasure digging with the discovery of the Book of Mormon in order to analyze Joseph's psychological profile. His conclusions are equally as valid to explain the mythic-psychological effect of treasure digging on Joseph's ultimate vocation as prophet. Comparing

18. See Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 116. Although Campbell deals mainly with male heroes, the sacred marriage may also represent the same coming to knowledge for females as well as males.

Joseph's explorations with seer stones and treasure digging to Carl Jung's analysis of an alchemist's attempt to use a philosopher's stone to change lead to gold, Brink indicates:

The gold which the alchemists sought was but a symbol of spiritual perfection which they hoped to achieve in themselves. From this perspective we may say that even if Joseph Smith had engaged in money-digging as a youth, this in no way proves him to have been an imposter. The technique of using a magic stone in order to obtain gold can be seen as a spiritual quest for perfection. Therefore, from a Jungian perspective, a young money-digger is not necessarily a swindler in the making. He may be a prophet in the making.¹⁹

Joseph's experience with treasure digging and his only treasure find, the Book of Mormon, did not yield riches for the Smith family, contrary to their expectations. Joseph's treasure-digging experiences and publication of the Book of Mormon did, however, bring spiritual wealth to the Smiths and the soon-to-be-founded Mormon church. After Joseph's trial in 1826 for being a "disorderly person and a juggler" (under a statute similar to vagrancy statutes today which particularly included a prohibition against treasure-digging seership²⁰) Joseph and his father, Joseph Sr., lamented that young Joseph had not used his prophetic gifts for greater uses. The message of the myth seems clear: listeners may find themselves in a heroic search for the boons of the material world and yet find heretofore unexplored paths to inner spiritual growth, follow them, and find a treasure to be retrieved and shared to restore their own soul and the world.

The current use of the story of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon by Mormons is almost entirely limited to missionary discussions and history texts, albeit in biblical-rationalized terms. I do not recall hearing the story used as a faith-story or myth told in a testimony meeting to inspire the listener. As I will later discuss, the story of Joseph, the plan of salvation, and the first vision are the living myths currently told by Mormons rather than the story of the golden plates. I hope my suggestions will enable us to use the story of the golden plates—as it appears to have been originally told—as a living myth in our faith discussions.

THE FIRST VISION AS HERO MYTH

The mythic potentiality of the first vision has elsewhere received

19. Brink, "Depth Psychology," 80.

20. See, for instance, Wesley P. Walters, *Joseph Smith's Bainbridge, N.Y. Court Trials* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, n.d.).

significant attention and will only be briefly treated in this essay.²¹ The first vision, although officially recorded in 1838 and discussed in private circles before that time, did not become a pronounced faith story told by Mormons until the 1880s.²² My discussion does not involve a detailed account of the different versions of the vision or a harmonization²³ of them in an attempt to reconstruct the story as first told, because it was not first told by Joseph or other Mormons for its mythic appeal, and also because the story is well known and is currently used for its mythic appeal.

The first vision is typically the first story told to non-Mormons interested in joining the LDS church. It has been described as the "central means by which Joseph Smith and others explained to themselves and others 'who we are.' In telling this story, Joseph was acting not as historian but as myth maker."²⁴ It is a shared experience by all Mormons and is used as the sacred form for Mormons in explaining their own heroic quest for truth and their adventure of faith and discovery of the treasure of testimony.

The first vision story follows the Campbell Hero pattern fairly closely. Joseph's readings in scripture (James 1:5) and attending revivals resulted in his call to adventure. He physically separated himself to a grove of trees to pray. He was visited by an evil force which bound his tongue; presumably this trial was overcome by his faithful struggle to continue his prayer. After this initiation, Joseph was then released from the invisible force that held him and he beheld a vision of angels, including the Son and Father. Joseph experienced atonement (reconciliation) with the Father when he was told his sins were forgiven him. The ultimate boon retrieved by Joseph was the knowledge that the true church of Jesus Christ would be restored through him. Joseph then returned to the world to share the knowledge gained from this adventure of the spirit.

As I remarked earlier, new Mormon converts often narrate their conversion experience along the lines of the first vision story and see themselves as bearers of a great boon to a reluctant world. More seasoned Mormons often find that they are spiritually reawakened when they hear the new convert's story of Hero quest and reflect on their own conversion and experience a renewal engendered by the teller of the conversion faith-story.

21. See, for instance, Mesle, "History, Faith and Myth," 13; Shipps, *Mormonism*, 32; and James B. Allen, "Emergence of a Fundamental: The Expanding Role of Joseph Smith's First Vision in Mormon Religious Thought," *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980): 43-61.

22. Allen, "First Vision."

23. I will use details from each of the different versions in my discussion. The different accounts are readily available. See, for instance, Dean C. Jessee, "Early Accounts of the First Vision," *Brigham Young University Studies* 9 (Spring 1969): 275-95.

24. Mesle, "History, Faith and Myth," 13.

JOSEPH SMITH'S RESTORATION AS RESTORATION OF THE HERO MYTH

As the work of Hugh Nibley and the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) have documented, the message of the Restoration as told by Joseph's visions, restored ancient texts, and restored ancient rituals can be compared to similar ancient visions, texts, and rituals with apologetic and exegetical benefits.²⁵ These comparisons also lend themselves to mythic analysis. Such an analysis may provide a Jungian collective unconscious framework (or some other psychological framework) for explaining the parallels and thereby negate their direct apologetic use as confirmatory evidence of Joseph's prophetic abilities. But even Jungian psychological explanations (and perhaps others) can be harmonized with the Mormon doctrine of the pre-existence of humankind—the equivalent of the Jungian collective unconscious—and could explain the uniformity of archetypes discovered by Jung and others in all cultures.²⁶

Regardless of the apologetic use of such parallels, the core faith story of Mormonism, the plan of salvation, and its ritual form, the temple endowment, follow the Campbell Hero pattern. I choose not to discuss the endowment but suggest that temple-going Mormons read Hugh Nibley's *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*²⁷ and John Lunquist's "The Common Temple Ideology of the Ancient Near East"²⁸ to see the extent to which Mormon temple ritual fits the Campbell Hero pattern.

The story of the plan of salvation in narrative form can be told by nearly any child in Primary. Before we were born, we lived with heavenly parents. Our call to adventure took place in the heavenly council when we sided with Jesus and Michael against Lucifer and a third of the heavenly host. After this conflict, we left them to come to earth to undergo mortal initiation consisting of trials often caused by Satan and his followers.

Mormons have specific and general forms of supernatural aid during this quest. Aside from visions, dreams, and other experiences, we believe

25. See, for instance, Hugh W. Nibley [Stephen D. Ricks, ed.], *Enoch the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1986); and C. Wilfred Griggs, "The Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book," in Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 75-101.

26. Other approaches to myth may shed further light on these issues. Structural approaches, as developed by Claude Levi-Strauss and others, may suggest that the Restoration through Joseph Smith of ancient narratives and ritual is a restoration of mythemes that reconcile the same binary opposite phenomena that were reconciled anciently, even though the ancient narratives and rituals may or may not have formal correspondence with the narratives and ritual restored through Joseph.

27. Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1975).

28. In Truman G. Madsen, ed., *The Temple in Antiquity* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984), 53-76.

that our patriarchal blessings are a specific aid guiding us in our quest. The Holy Ghost is also a gift given (Campbell points this out as well²⁹) to guide us on our search for the exaltation of our soul through (a) sacred marriage, (b) personal atonement with the Father (reconciliation through repentance), and (c) resurrection after death and return to the heavenly family (apotheosis) to jointly share in exaltation's boon.

The plan of salvation myth is clearly taught in Mormonism with the express purpose of enabling each individual to discover his or her divine nature (the call), join the community of faith (separation), and endure trials of keeping the commandments, persecution, and mortal sorrow, with the hope of a triumphant, heroic return to God's presence.

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH SMITH AS HERO MYTH

Joseph Smith's life, a life viewed by Mormons as having been lived according to the myth of the plan of salvation, also follows the Hero path in its typical tellings.

The Hero's call to adventure for Joseph's life as a prophet can be viewed as the combination of his divine call in the pre-existence—as evidenced by his (a) statements,³⁰ (b) restored textual prophecies,³¹ and (c) a family prophecy³² plus the first vision and discovery of the golden plates.

The supernatural aid given Joseph consisted of the Holy Ghost, his seer stones/Urim and Thummim, the Smith family parchments, amulets, and other paraphernalia, and constant revelatory experiences and visitations.

The trials of Joseph are numerous and well known: his leg operation as a child; the Kirtland, Ohio, tar and feathering; the "trials of Missouri," specifically, Liberty Jail; false imprisonments and trials; and finally his brutal death in a Carthage, Illinois, jail.

The telling of the Joseph story also includes a meeting with the goddess and apotheosis.

While polygamy is no longer taught or sanctioned in the mainstream church, it nevertheless has current mythic meaning and potential. While polygamy has been previously viewed as having been instituted (a) by

29. Campbell, *Thousand Faces*, 72-73.

30. See Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980).

31. Both the Book of Mormon and Joseph's inspired revision of the Bible contain prophecies about the rise of a prophet named Joseph. See 2 Ne. 3:5-16; JST Gen. 50:26-36.

32. Brigham H. Roberts, ed., *The History of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1978), 2:443.

Joseph at God's command (D&C 132), (b) by Joseph's lust,³³ (c) by Joseph's desire to broaden his family experience,³⁴ or (d) as a reaction to the breakdown of the traditional family in the nineteenth century,³⁵ polygamy as Joseph's meeting with the goddess makes mythological sense as a part of his Hero quest.

In addition, the Joseph Hero cycle also includes the story of his apotheosis. Joseph died a martyr's death and was called home again to a place where his enemies could no longer harm him. Beyond the veil, Joseph continues to lead and direct the church and sits with the exalted prophets of old. His restoration benefits us below and he continues to lead and direct above in the Kingdom of God: "Mingling with Gods he can plan for his brethren/ Death cannot conquer the Hero again."³⁶

CONCLUSION

At a minimum, I think the foregoing Hero myth analysis of Joseph Smith confirms Richard Bushman's conclusion that "[i]n the final analysis, the power of Joseph Smith to breathe new life into the ancient sacred stories, and to make a sacred story out of his own life, was the source of his extraordinary influence."³⁷ Bushman's conclusion that "[t]he strength of the church, the vigor of the Mormon missionary movement, and the staying power of the Latter-day Saints from 1830 to the present [1984] rest on the belief in the reality of those events" is undoubtedly true, but given the phenomenon of the "closet doubter" in the church,³⁸ one wonders if Bushman's observation might be broadened so that the strength of the church partially rests on the psychological response of its members to the mythic elements of the sacred stories of Joseph Smith and the church and the mythic boon they brought to humankind as Hero.³⁹

33. See Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945).

34. Brink, "Depth Psychology," 82.

35. See Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

36. W. W. Phelps, "Praise to the Man," no. 27, *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1985).

37. Bushman, *Beginnings*, 188.

38. See D. Jeff Burton, "The Phenomenon of the Closet Doubter," *Sunstone* 7 (Sept.-Oct. 1982): 34-38.

39. Although most Mormons and non-Mormons tend to accept or reject the Joseph Smith story based solely on empirical/ historical grounds, many rank-and-file Mormons I have known appear to have an unarticulated mythic sense of his story and yet use orthodox language when discussing it even though they do not have a conventional "testimony" of the reality of Smith's experiences. Whether Mormon general authorities

A reviewer of Dean Jessee's compilation *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* recently commented that as a result of such fine research by Jessee and others we are now making real progress in our "search for the historical Joseph,"⁴⁰ alluding to Albert Schweitzer's groundbreaking *In Search of the Historical Jesus*. Perhaps one day soon a reviewer will speak of the growing body of literature proposing mythological approaches to Joseph and Mormonism and say we are now making real progress in our "search for the mythological Joseph and his church." At that point, our experience of Joseph's narratives and other faith stories of our tradition will have called us to the soul's high adventure and we will have embarked on our own spiritual heroic quest.

respond or have responded in a mythic manner while nevertheless maintaining a more orthodox posture is more difficult to determine. Although a matter of controversy, B. H. Roberts apparently came to view his belief in the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's production of it in a mythic sense as a psychological event of profound reality, although perhaps non-historical. See Brigham D. Madsen, ed., *Studies in the Book of Mormon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 23-24. Similarly, while discussing the Book of Abraham with Thomas Ferguson, Apostle Hugh B. Brown is reported to have agreed with him regarding the non-historical nature of that book, evidently revealing a possible mythic interpretation of it. See Stan Larson, "The Odyssey of Thomas Stuart Ferguson," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 23 (Spring 1990): 55-93.

40. See the review of Marvin S. Hill in *Brigham Young University Studies* 25 (Summer 1985): 117-25.