

From Captain Kidd's Treasure Ghost to the Angel Moroni: Changing *Dramatis Personae* in Early Mormonism

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ONE DAY IN LATE MARCH 1697, a ship named the *Adventure Galley* arrived at the Island of Mohilla, one of the Comoro Islands. Its fever-stricken crew careened the vessel for cleaning and then proceeded to die off one by one, fifty men dead in about a week. The *Adventure Galley* had come to the Comoros the previous month, after stopping first at the neighboring Island of Johanna. It would not depart again until April 18. Its captain, William (a.k.a. Robert) Kidd, did not know he would soon become one of history's most famous, and notorious, pirates.

In those days pirates, even famous ones, were no oddity in the Comoros. Anyone who read, for example, the popular two-volume *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pyrates* (1724 and 1728) by Daniel Defoe (a.k.a. Captain Charles Johnson), would find the Comoro Islands figuring into the accounts of Captains England, Misson, Tew, Kidd, Bowen, White, Condent, Cornelius, Howard, Williams, Burgess, North,¹ and la Bouche.² The pirate to whom Defoe dedicated his first chapter, Henry Avery (Every), also had a connection with the Comoros, which the author fails to men-

1. The edition used here is Daniel Defoe, *A General History of the Pyrates*, ed. Manuel Schonhorn, (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina, 1972). Johanna is mentioned in the accounts of Captains England, 118, 130, 132; Misson, 407-16; Tew, 424-26; Kidd, 443; Bowen, 461; White, 478; Condent, 584; Cornelius, 605; Williams, 503; Burgess, 510; and North, 516. Mayotta is mentioned in the accounts of Captains England, 118; Bowen, 461, 478, 481; White, 478, 481; Howard, 493; Williams, 503; and North, 516, 521, 539. Mohilla is mentioned in the accounts of Captains Misson, 407-14, 416, 418; Kidd, 443; and Williams, 503. Comoro is only mentioned in the account of Captain North, 516.

2. See Defoe, *General History*, 118, and the note on la Bouche, which speaks of his being "wrecked on Mayotta" (671).

tion.³ There were other pirates not treated by Defoe such as William Ayer, Captain Quail, John Ap Owen, Thomas Harris, William Cobb, and Davy Jones—all famous pirates who visited the Comoro Islands at one time or another.⁴

B. F. De Costa long ago noted that the Indian Ocean of the late seventeenth century was "swarming with pirates."⁵ It was the principal eastern theater of their piratical activity, just as the Caribbean was the principal western theater. The Comoro Islands were especially attractive to pirates because of their location at the northern end of the Mozambique Channel between the East Coast of Africa and Madagascar. Their goal was to take merchant ships, such as those of the East India Company, heading south toward the Cape of Good Hope loaded with rich stocks of cargo from ports in the Red Sea, the Persian Gulf, and India. The only way these vessels could avoid sailing by the Comoros was to go around the eastern side of Madagascar, but of course there were lots of famous pirates hanging around over there, too. Captain Kidd himself would eventually make his way there and scuttle the *Adventure Galley* near one of the most notorious pirate hangouts, the Island of St. Mary's.

The largest of the Comoro Islands, Grand Comoro, was less interesting to pirates than it later would be to Mormons. For a long time it was ruled by twelve Sultans. One of the most important of these was the Sultan of Bamboa, who ruled over two large towns on the west coast of the island: Iconi and Moroni, the latter having a harbor. In the *Swahili Chronicle of Ngazija* written by Said Ali, the last of the Sultans of Bamboa (abdicated to the French in 1912), it is explained that these two towns (*Ikoni* and *Mroni*) were among the island's most ancient.⁶ Today Moroni is the capital of the Comoros. But we were talking about Captain Kidd.

Early in 1698, Captain Kidd departed the East and headed for the West Indies. He was now commanding a ship he had taken, the *Quedah Merchant*. Arriving in the West Indies, he was greeted with the news that a charge of piracy had been leveled against him. He made a hasty return to New York in yet another ship, the *Antonio*, hoping to clear his name. From there he made his way to Boston, where he was promptly placed under arrest, sent to England, tried, and hanged on May 23, 1701.

There is very little in Captain Kidd's actual career that would explain his peculiar notoriety. Some of it, to be sure, must derive from the fact that he had initially set out, armed with a commission from King William III of England—which spoke familiarly of him as "our trusty and well beloved Captain William Kidd"—to fight the pirates. No doubt the kind words of the King

3. Captain Avery wrote a letter from Johanna on February 18, 1695 (see Defoe, *General History*).

4. "Pirates," in Martin Ottenheimer and Harriet Otteneimer, *Historical Dictionary of the Comoro Islands, African Historical Dictionaries* 59 (Metuchen, N.J. & London: Scarecrow Press, 1994), 68.

5. B. F. De Costa, "Captain Kidd-Why Was He Hung," *The Galaxy* 7, no. 5 (May 1869): 743.

6. Said Bakari Bin Sultan Ahmed, *The Swahili Chronicle of Ngazija*, ed. Lyndon Harris (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1977), 12, 41.

served to underscore the wretched villainy of Kidd, who ultimately joined the very people he had been sent to destroy.

But it was the rumor of an enormous treasure trove buried somewhere, or scuttled along with the mysteriously missing *Qedah*, which did most to immortalize the man. The fact that Kidd was arrested so soon after arriving in Boston made it highly likely, or so many believed, that his treasure was still out there, somewhere, waiting to be discovered. Thus, Kidd's treasure became the most vigorously sought pirate's prize of all. For Mormons, the fact that the pirate was hanged for crimes allegedly committed in the vicinity of Moroni on Grand Comoro is significant because the hunt for his treasure came to play a part in the story of Moroni on Comorah. To discover how this came to pass, we must begin on page 275 of E. D. Howe's *Mormonism Unveiled*.

FROM MONEY-DIGGER'S YARN TO RESTORATION HISTORY

Eber D. Howe complained in his 1834 book, *Mormonism Unveiled*, that a "great variety of contradictory stories were related by the Smith family, before they had any fixed plan of operation, respecting the finding of the plates."⁷ On 2 December of the previous year, Parley Chase remarked similarly, "In regard to their Gold Bible speculation, they [the Smiths] scarcely ever told two stories alike."⁸ Abner Cole, writing under the pseudonym Obediah Dogberry, reported in the 14 February 1831 Palmyra *Reflector* that "[i]n the commencement, the imposture of the 'book of Mormon,' had no regular plan or features."⁹ Yet a careful study of the *Traditionsgeschichte* (tradition history) of the story of the initial discovery of the plates indicates these criticisms were only partly justified. Admittedly, there are considerable differences in detail between the various accounts, but ultimately only two basic versions of the story exist. The first is a fairly typical preternaturalistic money-diggers' yarn while the second has become an integral component of the story of the restoration of authentic primitive Christianity. I am interested here in the earlier version and especially in the identity, character, and function of the angel Moroni in that version.

Yet to speak of the "angel Moroni" in connection with the earlier version of the plates story is to commit a double anachronism. The figure who would become the angel Moroni, was not called Moroni in that version, nor was he an angel. The personage who met Joseph Smith, Jr., on the night of October 22, 1823 at the site where the plates were discovered did not begin to be named "Moroni" until the early 1830s. In the original 1835 edition of the *Doctrine and*

7. E[ber]. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled: Or a Faithful Account of that Singular Imposition and Delusion, From Its Rise to the Present Time* (Painesville, Ohio: by the author, 1834).

8. Affidavit of Parley Chase in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 248.

9. "Golden Bible, No. 4," *The Reflector* 2, no. 1 (February 14, 1831): 13. Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 2: 244-45.

Covenants (50:2, now 27:5)¹⁰, a revelation dated September 4, 1830 speaks of "Moroni, whom I have sent unto you to reveal the book of Mormon." However, the parallel version of the same revelation in the 1833 *Book of Commandments* (chap. 28) does not have this statement.¹¹ In 1834-1835, Oliver Cowdery wrote an account of the "origin of the Book of Mormon and the rise of the Church of Jesus Christ," which appeared as a series of eight letters written to W. W. Phelps and was published in the *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*. In the sixth letter, appearing in the April 1835 issue, Cowdery refers explicitly to "the angel Moroni" as the name of the guardian of the plates.¹² The name Moroni had also appeared the previous year in a story dating from "some time after" the translation of the Book of Mormon was finished and the plates had been returned to the ground (1829-1830).¹³ This story appeared in E. D. Howe's *Mormonism Unveiled* (1834), based on testimony given by Leman Copley in the trial of Philastus Hurlbut in April 1834. Copley said he heard the name, "Moroni," first from Joseph Knight, after which "it was confirmed to him by Joseph [Smith] himself":

After he had finished translating the Book of Mormon, he again buried up the plates in the side of a mountain, by command of the Lord. . . he was going through a piece of woods, on a by-path, when he discovered an old man dressed in ordinary gray apparel, sitting upon a log, having in his hand or near by, a small box. On approaching him, he asked him what he had in his box. To which the old man replied, that he had a MONKEY, and for five coppers he might see it. Joseph answered, that he would not give a cent to see a monkey, for he had seen a hundred of them. He then asked the old man where he was going, who said he was going to *Charzee*. Joseph then passed on, and not recollecting any such place in that part of the country, began to ponder over the strange interview, and finally asked the Lord the meaning of it. The Lord told him that the man he saw was MORONI, with the plates, and if he had given him the five coppers, he might have got his plates again.¹⁴

E. D. Howe was so impressed by Copley's story that he included an engraving of the scene opposite the title page in the front of his book, *Mormonism Unveiled*.

10. Modern editions of the D&C date this revelation August 1830.

11. The 1833 *Book of Commandments* statement, "I will drink of the fruit of the vine, with you, on the earth, and with all those whom my Father hath given me out of the world" (p. 60; 28:6), becomes in the 1835 *Doctrine and Covenants*, "I will drink of the fruit of the vine with you on the earth, and with Moroni, whom I sent unto you to reveal the book of Mormon, containing the fullness of the everlasting gospel" (180; 50:2). For an account of the expansion of this revelation, see H. Michael Marquardt, *The Joseph Smith Revelations: Text & Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), 72-80.

12. Oliver Cowdery, "Letter VI to W. W. Phelps, Esq.," *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1, no. 7 (April 1835): 112. Cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:443.

13. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 277.

14. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 277.

Whether or not the story is true, its publication in Howe's book proves that the name Moroni was being used for the overseer of the plates by the first half of 1834, the time of Copley's testimony and the publication of Howe's book. Of course, it may also have been used earlier. As we shall see in the earliest preserved account of the plates, the figure overseeing them is described as "the spirit of the prophet who wrote this book."¹⁵ The precise date of the origin of the name matters less than that we avoid using it when referring to early accounts containing a figure who corresponds to the later Moroni, but who is not actually called Moroni.¹⁶ It is cumbersome to speak continually of "the figure who later became Moroni," or, "came to be called Moroni," or "appeared only later in the literature as Moroni." So for convenience's sake, we shall henceforth call that figure Moroni except where it might otherwise become an occasion for confusion.

MORONI'S PRE-ANGELIC STATUS

Obediah Dogberry (Abner Cole), writing in the 28 February 1831 *Palmyra Reflector*, stated: "It is well known that Jo Smith never pretended to have any communion with angels, until a long after the *pretended* finding of his book."¹⁷ Joseph Capron reported that when Joseph Smith, Sr., first told him of the translation and publication of the golden plates, "He gave me no intimation, at that time that the book was to be of a religious character, or that it had any thing to do with revelation."¹⁸ Emma Smith's cousins, Joseph and Heil Lewis, confirmed this when they commented on the version of the story expressed in their hearing "at the commencement of his translating his book" (Spring 1828):

In all this narrative, there was not one word about "visions of God," or of angels, or heavenly revelations. All his information was by that dream, and that bleeding ghost. The heavenly visions and messages of angels, etc., contained in Mormon books, were after-thoughts, *revised to order*.¹⁹

15. Affidavit of Willard Chase in *ibid.*, 243.

16. Historian D. Michael Quinn says on one occasion that Joseph Knight's history was "the only Mormon source for details of the angel Moroni's annual visits with Smith from 1823-1827" (*The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994], 20) while on another occasion, "Smith's earliest autobiography (1832) gave the angel's name as 'Maroni'" (*Mormonism and the Magic World View* [rev. ed.; Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998], 199). Knight's history, however, does not contain the name Moroni, and Smith's 1832 autobiography has "Maroni" as the spelling of the name of the *Book of Mormon* author, not the angel.

17. "Golden Bible, No. 5" *The Reflector* 2, no. 1 (February 28, 1831): 13, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:246.

18. Affidavit of Joseph Capron in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 260.

19. "Mormon History. A New Chapter, About to Be Published," *Amboy Journal* 24 (April 30, 1879): 1, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:303, 305.

The significance of the phrase "that bleeding ghost" will be discussed later. Earlier we said that, apart from differences in details, there were only two basic versions of the story of the finding of the plates. It is by observing the changes in the details—one added here, another dropped there—that one is able to trace the story's development from its earlier to its later version. This process is essential because, while the date usually given for the initial encounter with the plates is September 22, 1823, the earliest account—that is to say, the one preserving the earliest version of the story—is found ten years later in the December 11, 1833 affidavit of Willard Chase, who relates the story as told to him by Joseph Smith, Sr., in June 1827. As we will see, a number of evidential indicators within this affidavit suggest that this account is indeed the earliest. The elder Smith tells Chase that his son Joseph, Jr., had been told in a vision of the existence of "a record on plates of gold"²⁰ and that "he must repair to the place where was deposited this manuscript, dressed in black clothes, and riding a black horse with a switch tail, and demand the book in a certain name, and after obtaining it, he must go directly away, and neither lay it down nor look behind him." Joseph then goes forth, dressed and mounted in the prescribed fashion, arrives at the spot, recovers the book of plates, but then "fearing some one might discover where he got it, he laid it down to place back the top stone." The lid in place, Joseph turns again to pick up the book, only to discover it has disappeared. Then,

He again opened the box, and in it saw the book, and attempted to take it out, but was hindered. He saw in the box something like a toad, which soon assumed the appearance of a man, and struck him on the side of his head. . . he again stooped down and strove to take the book, when the spirit struck him again, and knocked him three or four rods, and hurt him prodigiously. After recovering from his fright, he enquired why he could not obtain the plates; to which the spirit made reply, because you have not obeyed your orders. He then enquired when he could have them, and was answered thus: come one year from this day, and bring with you your oldest brother, and you shall have them.²¹

Joseph Sr. then identifies the personage his son encountered as "the spirit of the prophet who wrote this book, and who was sent to Joseph Smith, to make known these things to him."²²

However, Joseph Sr. tells Chase that the final instruction could not be carried out because his oldest son Alvin Smith had, by "*an accidental providence*," died before the year was out. The reference to the death of Alvin is significant. It suggests there may have been at least some talk of the plates prior to November 19, 1823, the date of Alvin's death. Peter Ingersoll, in his affidavit in Howe,

20. Affidavit of Willard Chase in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 242.

21. *Ibid.*

22. *Ibid.*, 243.

traces the origin of the plates story to soon after August 1827 when Joseph Jr. promised his father-in-law Isaac Hale that he would give up money-digging. According to Ingersoll, Joseph had been out walking after a rain when he happened across some "beautiful white sand," several quarts of which he tied up in his frock and carried home. When questioned by his family about the contents of his frock, Joseph reported. "At that moment I happened to think of what I had heard about a history found in Canada, called the golden Bible; so I very gravely told them that it was the golden Bible. To my surprise, they were credulous enough to believe what I said."²³ The impression given by Ingersoll's account is that the golden bible story was hatched on the spur of the moment in the fall of 1827.

At the very least, there was more to this story than might appear. As we have seen, Joseph Sr. first spoke to Willard Chase about the plates at least three months earlier, in June 1827, but the part played by Alvin in the elder Smith's telling of the story in Chase's account, pushes the origin of the story back several years. Why otherwise would the spirit's request for the presence of Alvin be mentioned at all? None of the early accounts of the second vision are dated anywhere near 1823, the year the event is said to have occurred. Most date from the time after the plates were already said to be in Smith's hands, September 1827. Except for the role that was supposed to have been played by Alvin on September 22, 1824, we might have suspected that no plate story existed prior to c. 1827. Alvin's role in the story also may explain why Joseph Sr. felt compelled to dig up Alvin in the presence of some neighbors and then place an advertisement in the *Wayne Sentinel* to quell rumors that his son had been "removed from the place of his interment and dissected."²⁴ Brodie remarked, "It is difficult to explain this cruel practical joke as other than someone's attempt to ridicule the digging activities of the Smith family."²⁵ A better explanation is found when one considers that the date of both the public exhumation of Alvin's body and the placement of the advertisement was September 25, 1824, just three days after Alvin was supposed to have made an appearance with Joseph Jr. in the presence of the spirit at the location where the plates were hidden. If it was known that Joseph Jr. would only be able to obtain the plates with his brother, Alvin, someone might easily have jumped to the conclusion that this had been accomplished in the only way possible: by digging Alvin up and taking his body (or part of his body, perhaps a finger or something) to the spirit.

Chase says that when Joseph Jr. appeared before the spirit without Alvin, he was instructed to return again after another year and to "bring a man with him. When Joseph asked who the man might be, he was told that *he would know him when he saw him*. Joseph believed that one Samuel T. Lawrence was the man alluded to by the spirit, and went with him to a singular looking hill, in Manches-

23. Affidavit of Peter Ingersoll in *ibid.*, 235-36.

24. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:218.

25. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 2d ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 28. See also Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:18.

ter, and shewed him where the treasure was" (italics added).²⁶ Lawrence later disappears from the story, and Emma Hale replaces him as the one Joseph would recognize "when he saw him." For example, in the story told Henry Harris by Joseph Smith, Jr., sometime between Martin Harris's February 1828 trip to New York to consult Professors Mitchell and Anthon, and the publication of the *Book of Mormon* in March 1830, Joseph reported having

had a revelation from God that told him they [the golden plates] were hid in a certain hill and he looked in his stone and saw them in the place of deposit; that an angel appeared and told him he could not get the plates until he was married, *and that when he saw the woman that was to be his wife, he should know her, and she would know him.* He then went to Pennsylvania, got his wife, and they both went together and got the gold plates. (Italics added)²⁷

Joseph Knight's account appears to reflect a stage soon after Emma replaced Lawrence as the person Joseph would know:

But when the 22nd Day of September [1824] Came he went to the place and the personage appeared and told him he Could not have it now But the 22nd Day of September nex[t] he mite have the Book if he Brot with him the right person[.] *Joseph Says, who is the right Person[?] The answer was you will know[.]* Then he looked in his glass and found it was Emma Hale. (Italics added; Vogel's bracketed improvements)²⁸

Knight further reports that Lawrence "had Bin to the hill and knew about the things in the hill and he was trying to obtain them" and that Joseph "was some afraid of him that he mite be a trouble to him."²⁹

Emma's significance in the story was tied to the claim made by Joseph Jr. that the plates would be translated by his and Emma's firstborn son when the child was two years old.³⁰ The death of the child at birth on June 15, 1828 undermined this claim, and the special significance of Emma disappears from later accounts of the story of the plates.³¹

In the affidavit of Henry Harris quoted above, the transformation to the later, Christianized version of the second vision is almost complete; Joseph learned of the plates via a "revelation from God," and he received his instruc-

26. Affidavit of Willard Chase in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 243.

27. Affidavit of Henry Harris in *ibid.*, 252.

28. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:13.

29. *Ibid.*, 4:14-15.

30. See the affidavits of Willard Chase, Isaac Hale, and Sophia Lewis in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 246-47, 264, 269, respectively.

31. Sophia Lewis reportedly said that "she heard Smith say, 'the Book of Plates could not be opened under penalty of death by any other person but his (Smith's) first-born, which was to be a male.' She says she 'was present at the birth of this child, and that it was still-born and very much deformed'" (Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 269).

tions about getting them from "an angel."³² These two items are consistent with the final form as it appears in the official version published in church literature today. However, the mention of Joseph's use of his seer-stone and of Emma's role are remainders of the earlier version. The account given by Emma Smith's cousins Joseph and Heil Lewis appears just on the earlier side of the dividing line between the two versions:

He said that by a dream he was informed that at such a place in a certain hill, in an iron box, were some gold plates with curious engravings, which he must get and translate, and write a book; that the plates were to be kept concealed from every human being for a certain time, some two or three years; that he went to the place and dug till he came to the stone that covered the box, when he was knocked down; that he again attempted to remove the stone, and was again knocked down; this attempt was made the third time, and the third time he was knocked down. Then he exclaimed, "Why can't I get it?" or words to that effect; and then he saw a man standing over the spot, which to him appeared like a Spaniard, having a long beard coming down over his breast to about here, [Smith putting his hand to the pit of his stomach] with his [the ghost's] throat cut from ear to ear, and the blood streaming down, who told him that he could not get it alone; that another person whom he, Smith, would know at first sight, must come with him, and then he could get it. *And when Smith saw Miss Emma Hale, he knew that she was the person*, and that after they were married, she went with him to near the place, and stood with her back toward him, while he dug up the box, which he rolled up in his frock, and she helped carry it home. That in the same box with the plates were spectacles; the bows were of gold, and the eyes were stone, and by looking through these spectacles [spectacles] all the characters on the plates were translated into English. (Italics added, Vogel's bracketed improvements)³³

This account is still clearly related to Joseph Smith's earlier money-digging yarn, and the links between this version and that related by Willard Chase are numerous and obvious. As would be expected, there is no longer any mention of Samuel T. Lawrence. Instead the spirit's directions lead Smith directly to Emma. Also, the seer stone used before to find the plates has been replaced with "spectacles" in the box with the plates. But what will be especially important here are the additional details describing the spirit. He is referred to both as a ghost and as a man. He has a long beard down to the "pit of his stomach" and looks "like a Spaniard." The most significant detail is the statement that "his (the ghost's) throat [was] cut from ear to ear, and the blood streaming down." Why was the ghost's throat cut? Joseph and Heil Lewis do not offer any suggestion as to the meaning of this detail, which lends a certain credibility to their recollection of it as part of the account. People conversant in treasure-digging lore would have

32. Affidavit of Heary Harris in *ibid.*, 252.

33. "Mormon History: A New Chapter," in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:303-305.

recognized that the cut throat pointed to the ghost having been murdered and buried along with the treasure to serve as treasure guardian. Folklorist Ernest W. Baughman summarizes this motif as: "Person burying treasure kills person to supply treasure guardian."³⁴ Had Emma's cousins been familiar with the motif, we would have expected them to mention it since they would surely have regarded such a detail as discrediting Smith, which they seemed eager to do.

The significance of the cut throat is made explicit in Fayette Lapham's account. Lapham visited Joseph Smith, Sr., in 1829 or 1830 and reported the following:

[Joseph Jr.] then told his father [Joseph Sr.], that, in his dream, a very large and tall man appeared to him, dressed in an ancient suit of clothes, and the clothes were bloody. And the man said to him that there was a valuable treasure, buried many years since, and not far from that place; and that he had now arrived for it to be brought to light, for the benefit of the world at large; and, if he would strictly follow his directions, he would direct him to where it was deposited.³⁵

Joseph Jr. fails in his initial attempt to obtain the plates, and this is when we learn why the spirit's clothes were bloody:

[H]e looked up and saw the same large man that had appeared in his dream, dressed in the same clothes. He said to him that, when the treasure was deposited there, he was sworn to take charge of and protect that property, until the time should arrive for it to be exhibited to the world of mankind; and in order to prevent his making an improper disclosure, *he was murdered or slain on the spot*, and the treasure had been under his charge ever since. (Italics added.)³⁶

TREASURE-GUARDIAN SPIRITS

A stock character in the theater and lore of money-digging is the treasure guardian spirit. The spirit might be a demon, an animal familiar spirit, a ghost, or even Old Scratch (the Devil) himself. The business of treasure-guardian spirits was to befuddle and thwart people trying to recover buried treasure. Sometimes they did this by scaring off the money-diggers, other times by making the treasure sink away out of their reach, usually in response to some bungle in cer-

34. Earnest W. Baughman, *Type and Motif Index of the Folktales of England and North America*, Indiana University Folklore Series 20 (The Hague, The Netherlands: Mouton, 1966), E291:1. Baughman says that "this motif is implicit in most of the E291 references." See also Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, rev. and enlarged ed., 6 vols. (Bloomington and London: Indiana University, 1966), E291.

35. Fayette Lapham, "Interview with the Father of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet, Forty Years Ago. His Account of the Finding of the Sacred Plates," *Historical Magazine*, 2nd Ser. 7, May 1870, 305, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:458-59.

36. *Ibid.*, 1:459-60.

emonial procedure on the part of the money-diggers. That the Smiths as money-diggers would have been conversant in the lore of treasure guardians is well known and regularly discussed.³⁷

The salamander in Mark Hofmann's "Salamander Letter" was a treasure guardian. In his forged 1828 letter from Joseph Smith, Jr., to Josiah Stowell, Hoffman had the prophet speak of treasure being "guarded by some clever spirit."³⁸ Winchell, the Vermont money-digger who stayed for a time in the home of Oliver Cowdery's father, also included a treasure-guardian spirit as part of his routine, impressing on the participants that "there was a 'divinity' guarding the treasure, and that if there was any lack of faith in any one of the party, or any should utter a word while removing the stone and taking out the chest, that this divinity would put the money forever beyond their reach. . . ."³⁹ Barnes Frisbie, who tells the story of Winchell in his 1867 *History of Middletown, Vermont*, also suggests a possible connection between Winchell and Joseph Smith, Sr.⁴⁰

One of the most common types of treasure guardians was not the devil, nor a demon or animal familiar, but the ghost of a person who had been murdered and buried with the treasure. The treasure ghost, in contrast to other types of treasure guardians, was not necessarily evil. Usually he was an unfortunate victim. What has not been adequately appreciated is the link between Moroni and this particular type of treasure guardian. It is this connection, upon which I will ultimately focus, but there is one detail in the account of Willard Chase which needs to be discussed first, namely, the toad-like creature Joseph saw in the box with the plates.

According to Chase, Joseph Smith, Sr., told him that when Joseph Jr. had first unearthed the plates, he had seen "in the [stone] box something like a toad, which soon assumed the appearance of a man, and struck him on the side of his head."⁴¹ A second account including this detail comes from Chase's brother-in-law, Benjamin Saunders, who recalled: "I heard Joe tell my Mother and Sister how he procured the plates. . . .When he took the plates there was something down near the box that looked some like a toad that rose up into a man which forbid him to take the plates."⁴² D. Michael Quinn expresses concern over the presence of the toad in the story:

37. See, e.g., Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois, 1984), 71; Ronald W. Walker, "The Persisting Idea of American Treasure Hunting," *BYU Studies* 24 (1984): esp. 430-33, 442-45; D. Michael Quinn, *Magic World View* (see Quinn's index under "Treasure-quest. . . 'treasure guardian,'" 638). See also the testimonies of William Stafford and Joshua Stafford in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 238-39, 259.

38. Quoted in Marvin S. Hill, "Money-Digging Folklore and the Beginnings of Mormonism: An Interpretive Suggestion," *BYU Studies* 24 (1984), 473.

39. Barnes Frisbie, *The History of Middletown, Vermont* (Rutland, Vt.: Tuttle, 1867), 47, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:605.

40. *Ibid.*, 61, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:618-19.

41. Affidavit of Willard Chase in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 242.

42. Benjamin Saunders Interview, 1884, quoted in Quinn, *Magic World View*, 49.

In the Anglo-American occult tradition, the toad has always been associated with Satanism, black magic, sorcery, and witchcraft. The toad has only an evil meaning in the magic world view, a perception to which Joseph Smith and his family were demonstrably attuned. . . . To such people, it would be an evil "omen" to confront an ordinary toad just before the appearance of an other-worldly visitor.⁴³

Quinn is correct in asserting the satanic associations of the toad. Animal familiars (familiar spirits) often adopted the form of toads.⁴⁴ It is not unheard of for the toad to be associated with treasure. For example, a thirteenth-century Kentish divine "told of a miserly peasant who was horrified to see a devil, in the shape of a gigantic toad, squatting upon the hoard that he had so painfully accumulated."⁴⁵ In some cases, the toad represents the prince of darkness himself. In Joost van den Vondel's play *Adam in Exile* (1664), Lucifer, cast out of heaven, is transformed into a toad. Satan is described as "Squat like a Toad" as he crouches whispering temptations into the ear of Eve in the fourth book of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (lines 801-802).⁴⁶

Quinn says that Chase and Saunders actually had in mind not a toad but a salamander. Chase did not say Joseph "saw a toad," but that he saw "*something like a toad*,"⁴⁷ and Saunders also spoke only of "something. . . that looked *some like a toad*" (italics added).⁴⁸ Quinn argues further that Howe, who published Chase's affidavit, illegitimately gave additional specificity to it when he said that "Jo. . . looked in the hole, where he saw a toad."⁴⁹ Quinn writes, "Joseph Sr. and Joseph Jr. undoubtedly used the word 'salamander' or one of its equivalent descriptions."⁵⁰ Key to Quinn's case is an account of Benjamin's story, related by his nephew Orson Saunders in the June 25, 1893 edition of the *New York Herald*. In Quinn's words: "Smith allegedly said that 'the place seemed on fire' just before he saw the 'enormous toad' which became a 'flaming monster with glittering eyes.'"⁵¹ Quinn argues the reference to fire in this passage indicates that Smith had originally been thinking of a salamander, a creature traditionally thought to live and thrive in fire. Despite the fact that, as Quinn admits, the newspaper account is "a hostile third-hand version of Benjamin's friendly account," he still wants to see in it a bridge between Joseph's early account of the

43. Quinn, *Magic World View*, 152.

44. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner's, 1971), 445-46.

45. George Lyman Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1929), 204.

46. Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University, 1986), 95 (for *Adam in Exile*), 118 (for *Paradise Lost*).

47. Affidavit of Willard Chase in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 242.

48. Benjamin Saunders Interview, 1884, quoted in Quinn, *Magic World View*, 151.

49. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 276.

50. Quinn, *Magic World View*, 152-53. Quinn is aware, of course, that the so-called "Salamander Letter" made public in 1985 is a recent forgery.

51. Quinn, *Magic World View*, 153.

discovery of the plates and his later official account, in which "Smith still used such words as 'fire,' 'flame,' 'brightness of the sun,' 'brilliant,' and 'lightning' for the eyes, face, and general appearance of Moroni and other heavenly visitors."⁵²

But there are compelling reasons to reject Quinn's proposal. First, the 1893 *New York Herald* article strays too far from the other account of Benjamin Saunders to be trusted for its additional details. Second, this late account says the creature *was* a toad, rather than it was *like* a toad; in other words, it made the same mistake Quinn had already faulted Howe for making. Also, in the same connection, there is ambiguity regarding how the use of the word *like* in the accounts of Chase and Saunders should be understood. Was the creature *like* a toad but really a salamander, or was it *like* a toad but really a spirit being? Third, flames were simply not a feature in either the earlier or later versions of the plates story. We find no reference to flames or fire in the accounts of E. D. Howe, Willard Chase, Joseph Smith, Jr. (1832, 1836, and 1939),⁵³ Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph and Heil Lewis, Joseph Knight, Fayette Lapham, Henry Harris, Abigail Harris, nor even in the earlier account of Benjamin Saunders. In view of this third objection especially, the reference to the fire and a "flaming monster" in the 1893 *New York Herald* article should almost certainly be regarded as inauthentic. Since Quinn's suggestion that the toad-like creature was a salamander depends heavily upon this reference, it too ought to be rejected.

In a sense, Quinn's objection to Smith's use of toad imagery on the grounds that "[t]he toad has only an evil meaning in the magic world view" is beside the point, because treasure guardians were almost always regarded as evil in the magic worldview, no matter what form they took. Obediah Dogberry (Abner Cole) accurately summarized popular belief when he said that "treasures were held in charge of some *evil spirit*, which was supposed to be either the *Devil* himself, or some one of his most trusty favorites."⁵⁴ The one exception, and that by no means always, is the murdered treasure-guardian ghost.⁵⁵

In any case, when we come to the stage in the developing story reflected in the testimony of Willard Chase, the toad is not the devil, nor even a demon or familiar spirit, but rather, "the spirit of the prophet who wrote this book."⁵⁶ There are thus at least two ways to account for the toad in the story. The first is to regard it as a leftover from an earlier version of the story in which the devil or an

52. *Ibid.*, 152-53.

53. See the histories of 1832 (Scott H. Faulring, *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith*, 2d. ed. [Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1989], 6-7) and 1839 (Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:66-67) and Joseph Jr.'s 1836 conversation with Robert Matthews (Faulring, *American Prophet's Record*, 51-52).

54. "Golden Bible, No. 3." *The Reflector* 2, no. 1 (February 1, 1831): 12, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:242.

55. For example, an 1857 reference says that treasure guardian ghosts were "set as a watch, in league with the evil spirit" (William Hallam Bonner, *Pirate Laureate: The Life & Legend of Captain Kidd* [New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University, 1947], 115).

56. Affidavit of Willard Chase in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 243.

animal familiar served as treasure guardian. This explanation fits well with the diabolistic tradition already discussed. From that point of view, it would be perfectly natural to find the toad serving as guardian. Howe's written and graphic account of the fleeing Smith being kicked three or four feet off the ground by the devil,⁵⁷ might also point to the existence of such an earlier version. In any case, that is not what the toad reflects as it stands in Chase's account, since it transforms itself not into a demon or devil but into an ancient prophetic author. If we want to suggest that the toad is a leftover from an earlier account, we would have to explain why Joseph would have consciously retained a reference to a creature so clearly associated with evil, then have it transform itself into spirit of a prophet. Would that not imply that toad, prophet, and book were alike evil?⁵⁸

A second solution is suggested by another nineteenth-century treasure yarn. In "A Summer Trip to Newfoundland," S. G. W. Benjamin relates a tale told by a certain Johnnie Feene about a friend who,

four years previously, had left his family starving at Bay of Bulls village and gone to St. John in search of employment. Failing of this, he started for home, and was met after nightfall by a black dog, who addressed him, and then assuming human shape, informed him that he was an enchanted person fixed by a spell in a subterranean cavern near the Bay of Bulls, and that his enchantment could only be abated by the entrance of some one sufficiently bold to brave the guardians of the cave and carry hence the riches it contained. Overjoyed at the suggestion, the fisherman gladly volunteered to accompany the enchanted stranger, who accordingly introduced him to a subterranean hall, vast and gorgeous with oriental magnificence, where the wealth of the Indies lay apparently at his disposal, and he had it in his power not only to relieve the poverty of his condition, but also to become the most opulent of Queen Victoria's subjects. But suddenly he was assailed by a troop of unwholesome ghouls, who so disturbed his resolution that he fled to the upper air, renouncing possession of the riches in his grasp, and leaving the enchanted man enchanted there forever.⁵⁹

In Smith's story, a toad-like creature transformed itself into a man. Here it is a black dog. But dogs, especially black dogs, had little better reputations in terms

57. See the illustration opposite the title page of Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*.

58. There is a suggestive detail in the account Joseph Smith, Jr., told Robert Matthews in 1836: "I went and found the place where the plates were according to the direction of the Angel. Also saw them and the angel as before. The powers of darkness strove hard against me" (Faulring, *American Prophet's Record*, 52). In this passage it is not the angel who keeps Joseph from obtaining the plates. The angel is present, but it is the "power of darkness" that actually foils him. Admittedly the detail is likely of little value in interpreting the earlier account since it probably arose as a way of avoiding having the Angel Moroni knocking Smith on the head, a type of behavior not perhaps becoming to angels (but see Gen. 32:24-32).

59. S. G. W. Benjamin, "A Summer Trip to Newfoundland," *Scribner's Monthly* 2, no. 6 (October 1871): 619.

of their occultic associations than did toads. "The demonism of the dog," wrote Moncure D. Conway in 1872, "has been more universal than that of any other animal not fabulous. . . . [I]n the witch-times there perished many a poor creature the only evidence of whose sorcery was fondness for a black dog."⁶⁰ Nevertheless, in this story of Johnnie Feene's, the black dog which assumes the form of a man does not represent an evil being, but rather a hapless victim of enchantment. Perhaps then we should similarly consider the toad-like creature in Smith's story equally benign, despite the more generally malignant reputation of toads.

MURDERED TREASURE-GUARDIAN GHOSTS

The conventional wisdom on ghosts is and has for a long time been that they became what they are by coming to a bad end, by being murdered, or by suffering some other sudden traumatic death. This very kind of story played into the founding of Spiritualism, a movement which, like Mormonism, came to birth in the "burned-over district" of western New York during the first half of the nineteenth century. On the evening of March 31, 1848, a spirit nicknamed "Mr. Splitfoot" began rapping out answers to questions on the farm of John and Margaret Fox in the little village of Hydesville, New York. Mr. Splitfoot revealed that he was the spirit of a man who had been murdered and buried in the Fox's cellar before they had moved in. Mr. Splitfoot and other spirits like him would only rap, however, when two of the Fox's daughters, Katie and Margaretta, were present. In 1888 the sisters admitted they had made the rappings themselves by cracking their toes.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the story of Mr. Splitfoot's untimely end, born in Mrs. Fox's imagination and confirmed by her children's cracking toe joints, reflected perfectly conventional ideas about the origin of ghosts. We are all too familiar with this explanation of ghosthood even today.

But there was once another common reason people became ghosts. The ghost "walks," writes K. M. Briggs in her study of Elizabethan era beliefs, "be-

60. Moncure D. Conway, "The Demons of the Shadow," *Scribner's Monthly* 5, no. 1 (November 1872): 75. In the section on divination in the Jesuit Martín Del Río's *Disquisitiones Magicae* (Investigations into Magic), we read of a sixteenth-century treasure dig:

They say that in 1530, someone from Nuremberg saw treasure in a crystal, shown to him by an evil spirit. Later he, with one of his close friends acting as a witness, looked for the treasure which was buried in a certain spot in front of the city, and both of them saw a box in the hole they had dug. Lying next to it was a black dog. The magician (*magus*) approached the hole to open the box and drive off the dog, but he had not brought with him the bone of Cerberus. So he rummaged round the top of the hollow. But the structure collapsed on top of the wretched man and the hole filled up with earth. (Martín Del Río, *Investigations into Magic*, trans. and ed. by P. G. Maxwell-Stuart [Manchester and New York: Manchester University, 2000], 158)

61. Gilbert Seldes, *The Stammering Century: Minor Movements, Cults, Manias, Fads, Sects and Religious Excitements in 19th Century America* (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, [1928] 1965), 332.

cause of wrong done to it, *or buried treasure*" (italics added).⁶² Both these reasons are alluded to in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The real reason the ghost of Hamlet's father appears in the opening scene is that he had been murdered by his evil and designing brother Claudius, but when he is seen by Hamlet's friend Horatio, the young man suspects he became a ghost for the other reason: "[I]f thou hast uphoarded in thy life // Extorted treasure in the womb of the earth // For which, they say, you spirits oft walk in death, Speak of it: stay and speak!"⁶³ Philip Massinger (d. 1640) in his play, *The Old Law*, has a vindictive wife threaten to bury treasure so as to be able to continue to plague her husband after death: "I'll plague thee as long as I live with thee; and I'll bury some money before I die, that my ghost may haunt thee afterward."⁶⁴

The link between ghost and treasure was also a common one in early America. In Washington Irving's story *Wolfert Webber*, we encounter a ghost story similar to those we have been describing. A character argues that a recently discovered pot of money must have belonged to the long-dead Peter Stuyvesant because the Dutch governor's ghost had been seen one midnight, "stalking about in the meadow with his wooden leg, and a drawn sword in his hand, that flashed like fire? And what can he be walking for, but because people have been troubling the place where he buried his money in old times?"⁶⁵

In chapter 33 of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), Tom, Huck, and friends go to the place where the recently deceased Injun Joe had buried his treasure under a cross. As they arrive, the troubling possibility of Joe's ghost lurking around the spot starts to worry Huck:

"Tom, less git out of here!"

"What! and leave the treasure?"

"Yes—leave it. Injun Joe's ghost is round about there, certain."

"No it ain't, Huck, no it ain't. It would ha'nt the place where he died—away out at the mouth of the cave—five mile from here."

"No, Tom, it wouldn't. It would hang round the money. I know the ways of ghosts, and so do you."⁶⁶

62. K. M. Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck: An Examination of Fairy Beliefs among Shakespeare's Contemporaries and Successors* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), 144.

63. *Hamlet*, 1.1.36-39.

64. *The Old Law*, act 4, scene 1, in *The Plays of Philip Massinger* (London: for Henry Washbourne, 1845), 515. Another English dramatist, James Shirley (d. 1666), again connected "walking" with buried treasure in a play called *The Wedding*: Call this a church-yard, and imagine me / Some wakeful apparition 'mong the graves, / That, for some treasure buried in my life, / Walk up and down thus. [italics original] (quoted in *Plays of Philip Massinger*, 515).

65. Washington Irving, *Works of Irving* (New York: Putnam, 1860-1863), 7:420-21.

66. Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (Hartford, Chicago, and Cincinnati: The American Publishing Company, 1876), 259.

When one speaks of buried treasure, the class of historical figure who comes most readily to mind is the villainous raider of the high seas, the pirate. As already noted, the most vigorously sought pirate's treasure ever was that of Captain Kidd. Willard Hallam Bonner says that "*any* mention of buried treasure in the New World almost inevitably gravitates to Kidd" (*italics original*).⁶⁷ "Kidd's wealth," wrote Samuel Adams Drake in a book published in 1875, "must have been beyond computation. There is scarcely a headland or an island from Montauk to grand Meman which according to local tradition does not contain some portion of his spoil."⁶⁸ Alexander Winston provides an overview of the breathtaking extent, both temporally and geographically, of the quest for Kidd's treasure as well as its regular occult features:

So many midnight diggers pitted a New York farm in 1762 that the owner begged them to dig by day—and fill in the holes. A housewife's "mesmeric revelation" in 1846, placing the sunken *Quedah* on the Hudson bottom, jewels heaped in her "like ducks' eggs in a pond," started a gold rush up the river. The more occult have searched with Bible and key, sieve and shears, hazel wand, incantations, while business corporations, lacking the psychic gift, resorted to dredges and dynamite. By one means or another, they have scoured the Atlantic coast from Nova Scotia to Key West, and the treasure was usually called Kidd's.⁶⁹

Particularly in connection with Kidd's treasure, stories of murdered guardian ghosts—the very kind Moroni started out as—were especially prevalent. Ronald W. Walker, for example, notes that "a murdered pirate (often a black man because they were believed to be 'the more honest') protected Captain Kidd's many treasure troves."⁷⁰ Appledore Island long boasted the presence of a ghost sometimes identified as one of Kidd's men. Nathaniel Hawthorne, for example, once visited the island and reports: "The island is said to be haunted by a spectre called 'old Bob.' He was one of Captain Kidd's men, and was slain for the protection of his treasure."⁷¹

67. Bonner, *Pirate Laureate*, 115.

68. Samuel Adams Drake, *Nooks and Corners of the New England Coast* (New York: Harper, 1875), 36.

69. Alexander Winston, *No Man Knows My Grave: Sir Henry Morgan, Captain William Kidd, Captain Woodes Rodgers in the Great Age of Privateers and Pirates 1665-1715* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 161.

70. Walker, "Persisting Idea," 443. I have not found that murdered treasure ghosts are predominantly black. Walker appears here to be paraphrasing a comment in Thomas Hazard's *The Johnny-Cake Letters* (1882): "Captain Kidd. . . always buried one of his men (generally a nigger, because they are the most honest,) to keep guard over it." Hazard's remark is quoted in Richard M. Dorson, *Jonathan Draws the Long Bow* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1946), 174, which Walker cites as one of the sources for the paragraph containing his own very similar comment.

71. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The American Notebooks*, Centenary Edition of the *Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne VIII*, ed. Claude M. Simpson (n.p.: Ohio University, 1972), 518. See further on the old Bob legend the editors note, *ibid.*, 668 and Abbie Murphy, "New England's Ghostly Pirates," *The Lookout* 58 (October 1967): 4.

Robert Kidd (1849) tells of a black man named James Marks of West Warren, Massachusetts, who was said to have been with Captain Kidd when young and who died at the age of 115 in 1802. As a boy of twelve, Marks and a white boy were said to have helped Kidd bury a chest of treasure on Long Island:

After the hole was dug and the chest lowered to the bottom, Kidd said to the boys "which one of you will take care of this money when I am dead and gone?" The white boy instantly answered, "I." At the same moment Kidd severed his head from his body and tumbled him into the hole with the chest.⁷²

Since Shaw's biography was partly fictionalized, we cannot vouch for the authenticity of James Marks's story,⁷³ but it reflects the common theme.⁷⁴

In her 1870 story, "Captain Kidd's Money," Harriet Beecher Stowe makes reference to murdered spirit-guardian ghosts. Her character Sam Lawson relates how Kidd, when burying his treasure, "allers used to kill one or two men or women or children of his prisoners and bury [them] with it, so that their sperits might keep watch on it ef anybody was to dig arter it."⁷⁵ This story is one of Stowe's *Old Fireside Stories*, meant to reflect life as the author remembered it as a child. Bonner maintains that the tales of Sam Lawson in these stories are "in all probability the true small talk and old wive's [sic] gossip of the 1820's."⁷⁶

One hundred fifty miles upriver from the mouth of the Connecticut River, there is an island nicknamed "Kidd's Island" because of a local tradition that Captain Kidd and Miles Braddish had buried treasure there along with the body of a beautiful Creole girl they had kidnapped in the West Indies, "covering in one grave their gold and their victim; setting as a watch over their pirate treasure, the spirit of her who was once a guileless maiden on the earth." The 1857 *Chicago Magazine* notes that on this island "the credulous a generation or two ago, dug up the earth to find the pirates' hoarded gold and silver." But they did not find it, nor apparently was any of Kidd's other treasure found, despite the fact that "traditionary legends of Kidd's buried treasure" are "[i]nnumerable." And why not? Because of Kidd's close alliance with the devil, and because

72. Quoted in Bonner, *Pirate Laureate*, 146.

73. Shaw's biography of Kidd was part of a hoax perpetrated along with his brother Samuel, who had forged a letter purportedly written by Kidd in 1701 then "discovered" by the boys in a bottle in a cave near Palmer, Massachusetts. Bonner calls the biography "well garnished with error, local legend, and three spurious documents" (*ibid.*, 145).

74. Charles M. Skinner in an account of similar incidents in the Long Island area, reports that "certain tough old bay men swore. . . they had seen. . . five men go ashore from a queer, black vessel, and bury a chest, only four of the men returning. Some seekers for this chest were alarmed by a skeleton, holding a dagger like a blue flame, that circle about them, nearer and nearer, till they dropped their spades and Bible and ran away." Charles M. Skinner, *American Myths & Legends* (Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott, 1903), 2:289.7

75. Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Captain Kidd's Money," *Atlantic Monthly* (November 1870): 523.

76. Bonner, *Pirate Laureate*, 179.

"[t]here was always buried with them, as tradition saith, the body of some murdered victim, who was set as a watch, in league with the evil spirit, to protect them from the grasp of any one who might discover and attempt to seize them."⁷⁷

Examples of stories about Kidd's treasure-guardian ghosts abound. Another, recounted in the 1835 *New-England Magazine*, tells how Kidd's murdered mistress and baby guard a treasure trove on the southern shore of Nassau Island.⁷⁸ Still another article, published in the same magazine in the same year, reports of Blacks on Long-Island: "[F]ully do they believe that, all along the shore, lie buried the inexhaustible treasures of Captain Kidd, each deposit guarded, by the ghost of a murdered man. . . ."⁷⁹

The motif of the murdered treasure ghost was also sometimes employed in texts not directly related to the Kidd legend. In "A Summer Trip to Newfoundland"—an article we have already encountered—S. G. W. Benjamin recounts a story in which a man had assisted in drawing "an irron chist of threasure" to the water's edge, when the ghost of a man, who was killed and buried with it to keep watch over it, suddenly appeared and spirited it away, "nevermore to be seen by mortal eye."⁸⁰ The Vermont writer Daniel Pierce Thompson's 1835 novel, *May Martin, or the Money Diggers*, tells of treasure diggers who are guided by a charlatan named Gow.⁸¹ Gow uses a divining rod but also a seer stone, which he identifies as the "same thin, yellow, speckled kind of stone I used when I said to discovered the pot of money on Cape Cod that they supposed Kidd buried there." Gow uses the stone "with his face protruded into his hat, which he held in his lap, seemingly gazing at something at the bottom."⁸² He claims to have obtained his information on the treasure from the last surviving member of the band of three who had buried it. He also says that when the treasure was buried,

77. "Kidd's Island: A Story of the Dorrillite Imposture," *Chicago Magazine: The West as it Is* (Chicago: J. Gager and Co. for Chicago Mechanics' Institute, 1857), 430.

78. "An Extract from the Ms. of 'Edmund Allerton,'" *New-England Magazine* 9, no. 11 (November 1835): 328-29.

79. "A Modern Pilgrimage," *New England Magazine* 9, no. 7 (July 1835): 37-8. This article refers to an 1827 journey.

80. Benjamin, "Summer Trip," 619.

81. Daniel Pierce Thompson wrote to his cousin on June 17, 1835, explaining that "the story is founded on facts. A band of money diggers made quite a [noise] in one of our back towns about 10 years ago" (H. Michael Marquardt Papers, Accession 900, Box 155, Folder 14 [Manuscripts Division, University of Utah Marriott Library, Salt Lake City, Utah], 3).

82. Judge [Daniel Pierce] Thompson, *May Martin, or, The Money Diggers* (The Romancist and Novelist's Library; London: J. Clement, 1841 [orig. ed. 1835]), 11, 20-22. The pages are quoted here from photocopies in H. Michael Marquardt Papers, Accession 900, Box 155, Folder 14 (Manuscripts Division, University of Utah Marriott Library, Salt Lake City, Utah).

a man was murdered and buried on the spot to serve as spirit guardian.⁸³ In the novel, Gow is in actuality an associate of the notorious Stephen Burroughs in Southern Canada whose band of counterfeiters preyed on the gullibility of rural bumpkins across the line in Vermont and other adjoining states. Captain Kidd's chronicler William Hallam Bonner summarizes the rest of the story:

[Gow] leads a group of simple Vermonters to the mountain treasure spot where, when they have uncovered the first dollar, they are to pay him a hundred dollars each. They strike a planted chest—and hear ghostly groans from the thicket. They finger the planted counterfeit dollars—and an accomplice properly rigged up with phosphorus and a mask runs screeching among them like some human hound of the Baskersvilles, with fiery eyes, flaming mouth, and severed throat.⁸⁴

Thompson's description of the terrifying figure indicates that one of its "skeleton arms" was "pointing to his bloody throat, which seemed to be cut from ear to ear."⁸⁵ Here, of course, we have a severed throat just like the early Moroni figure in the account of Joseph and Heil Lewis.

The ghosts of murdered people serving as treasure guardians are still sometimes mentioned. Maurice Alley, in an interview that appeared in a 1964 book on American regional folklore, tells how his grandfather, Quafie Faulkingham, had trouble with enchanted lizards while digging on Mark Island: "That's Mark Island where they claim pirates has buried money there. There's two people died there, man and a woman. The pirates left them there to guard the money."⁸⁶

CAPTAIN KIDD AND THE YOUNG JOSEPH SMITH

*Captain Kyd was his delight, and his favorite amusement
was to rig up like that piratical gentleman, and roar out
sanguinary sea-songs at the top of his voice.*

Louisa May Alcott wrote the above words about the boy Emil in the second

83. John E. Flitcroft, *The Novelist of Vermont: A Biographical and Critical Study of Daniel Pierce Thompson* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ., 1929), 84. For the relation of *May Martin* to the original local legend see pp. 82-85.

84. Bonner, *Pirate Laureate*, 177. Quinn sees a parallel to the "slippery" treasure of Helaman 13:35 and Mormon 1:18 in the *Book of Mormon* in the *May Martin* phrase, "prospects of another trial for the slippery treasure" (Quinn, *Magic World View*, 196).

85. Thompson, *May Martin*, 21.

86. Richard M. Dorson's interview with Maurice Alley in *Buying the Wind: Regional Folklore in the United States* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1964), 62-63. Faulkingham claimed he had succeeded in carrying off the treasure, but only after he "rubbed the lizards and took the enchantment off" (63).

chapter of her 1871 novel, *Little Men*.⁸⁷ She might just as easily have written them about Joseph Smith, Jr. Stories about pirates and, especially, stories about Captain Kidd, played a particularly important role in the young Joseph's imagination. According to J. H. Kennedy, Joseph "made confession" that the autobiography of Captain Kidd "made a deep impression upon him."⁸⁸ Kennedy does not say in what context Smith made this "confession." Palmyra native Philetus B. Spear recalled in an 1873 interview that as a boy Joseph "had for a library a copy of the 'Arabian Nights,' stories of Captain Kidd, and a few novels."⁸⁹ Pomeroy Tucker also mentions Joseph's youthful fascination with Captain Kidd, Stephen Burroughs the counterfeiter, and others, noting that such stories "presented the highest charms for his expanding mental perceptions."⁹⁰ Ellen E. Dickinson similarly wrote:

It is said that Joseph at an early age could read, but not write; and when quite young committed these lines to memory from the story of Captain Kidd, the notorious pirate, which seemed to give him great pleasure:

"My name was Robert Kidd,
As I sailed, as I sailed;
And most wickedly I did
As I sailed, as I sailed."⁹¹

The lines cited are from a popular song about Kidd. The tune was also given different words and made into a popular hymn, "How Precious is the Name," which was sung twice during the course of the assembly that gathered at Kirtland, Ohio, on 17 August 1835 to vote on the inclusion of the *Doctrine and Covenants* among the LDS church's scriptures.⁹²

But Joseph's interest in stories about Captain Kidd did not end with boyhood. Both he and other members of his family were regularly engaged in the pursuit of Kidd's lost treasure. J. H. Kennedy informs us that even before the

87. Multiple editions. See, e.g., Louisa May Alcott, *Little Men: Life at Plumfield with Jo's Boys* (Garden City, N.Y.: Nelson Doubleday, 1955), 28-29. Also, available at digital.library.upenn.edu/women/alcott/men/men.html.

88. J. H. Kennedy, *Early Days of Mormonism: Palmyra, Kirtland, and Nauvoo* (New York: Scribner's, 1888), 13.

89. Philetus B. Spear's recollections of c. 1873 are reported in the *Marion Enterprise* (Newark, N.Y.), September 28, 1923, 43:1, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:130.

90. Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism: Biography of its Founders and History of its Church* (New York: D. Appleton, 1867), 17, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:94.

91. Ellen E. Dickinson, *New Light on Mormonism* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1885), 28-29. Cf., Kennedy, *Early Days*, 13, and Ann Ruth Eaton *The Origin of Mormonism* (Woman's Executive Committee of Home Missions, 1881), in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:148-49.

92. *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, August 17, 1835, available on *New Mormon Studies CD-ROM* (Salt Lake City: Smith Research Associates, 1998). See also Fred C. Collier and William S. Harwell, eds., *Kirtland Council Minute Book* (Salt Lake City: Collier's Publishing, 1996), 126, 129.

Smiths settled in western New York, Joseph Smith, Sr., had been "at times engaged in hunting for Captain Kidd's buried treasure" in Vermont.⁹³ Kennedy's statement is corroborated by a letter of February 15, 1844, written to Joseph Smith, Jr., by some antagonistic former Vermont neighbors: "If you studied piracy while digging for the money your Father pretended old Bob Kidd <had> buried, you should also have studied the fate of the pirates."⁹⁴

Nor would Joseph and his family abandon their pursuit of Kidd's treasure after moving to western New York. E. D. Howe describes the prophet's parents as "having a firm belief in ghosts and witches; the telling of fortunes; pretending to believe that the earth was filled with hidden treasures, buried there by Kid[d] or the Spaniards."⁹⁵

Rumors of Kidd's treasure were not limited to sites on the Eastern seaboard. Nor were the Smiths particularly unique in digging for it. John Hyde, Jr., wrote in 1857: "It was quite common in the western part of New York, about thirty years ago [i.e., 1827], for men to dig for treasure which they supposed had been hidden by Captain Kidd and others."⁹⁶ The Smiths' Manchester, New York, neighbor Orrin Porter Rockwell told Elizabeth Cane in the early 1870s that "[n]ot only was there religious excitement, but the phantom treasure of Captain Kidd were sought for far and near, and even in places like Cumorah."⁹⁷

The February 16, 1825 issue of Palmyra's *Wayne Sentinel* reprinted a piece from the *Windsor (Vermont) Journal* bemoaning the fact that "the frightful stories of money being hid under the surface of the earth, and enchanted by the Devil or Robert Kidd, are received by many of our fellow citizens as truths."⁹⁸ In the course of his later activities in the counties along the New York/Pennsylvania border (after October 1825), Joseph might again have encountered legends concerning Kidd's treasure, such as the one relating to Spanish Hill near Waverly, New York, where it was said that Captain Kidd had buried his treasure and the devil was sometimes seen running along its top.⁹⁹ W. D. Purple, describing Joseph Jr.'s treasure digging in Pennsylvania, said "[w]hether it was the 'Ninety bars of gold And dollars many fold' that Capt. Robert Kidd, the pirate of a preceding century, had despoiled the commerce of the world, we are not able to say."¹⁰⁰

93. J. H. Kennedy, *Early Days*, 8.

94. "Green Mountain Boys to Thomas Sharp," February 5, 1844, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:597 (< > indicates words written above the line).

95. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 11.

96. John Hyde, Jr., *Mormonism, Its Leaders and Designs*, 2d ed. (New York: W. P. Fetridge, 1857), 263.

97. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:406-7.

98. Quoted in Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism* (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 75-76.

99. *Harper's New York and Erie Rail-Road Guide Book* (New-York: Harper & Brothers, 1855-1856), 151-52.

100. W. D. Purple, "Joseph Smith, The Originator of Mormonism. Historical Reminiscences of the Town of Afton," *Chenango Union*, May 3, 1877, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:129-30.

A Palmyra native and one-time governor of Utah Territory likewise recalled in 1882 having read a newspaper report in 1827 about how a "Golden Bible" had been discovered by "Joe Smith, who had spent his time for several years in telling fortunes and digging for hidden treasures, and especially for pots and iron chests of money, supposed to have been buried by Captain Kidd."¹⁰¹ Likewise, Ann Ruth Eaton in her 1881 account describes how, armed with his "peek stone," Joseph was able to discover "Caskets of gold stored away by Spaniards, or by his hero, the redoubtable Captain Kidd."¹⁰² Early Danish convert John Ahmanson, reports that "Joseph Smith found his [plates] while he was digging for treasure which was supposed to have been buried by the notorious buccaneer Captain Kidd in the western part of New York State."¹⁰³

Two of the affidavits collected by Arthur B. Deming for his *Naked Truths about Mormonism* speak of Joseph and his father continually digging for Kidd's treasure along the New York-Pennsylvania line. The first account by William R. Hine recalled in 1885 how Joseph dug for Kidd's money "on the west bank of the Susquehanna, half a mile from the river, and three miles from his salt wells":

Jo Smith claimed to be a seer. He had a very clear stone about the size and shape of a duck's egg, and claimed that he could see lost or hidden things through it. He said he saw Captain Kidd sailing on the Susquehanna River. . . and that he buried two pots of gold and silver. He claimed he saw writing cut on the rocks in an unknown language telling where Kidd buried it, and he translated it through his peep-stone.¹⁰⁴

In another affidavit, Ketchel E. Bell similarly recalls having been told by her brother Milo in 1885 that "he knew Jo Smith when he was digging near the Susquehanna River for Capt Kidd's Money. Jo had a peep-stone through which he claimed to see hidden or buried treasures."¹⁰⁵

TWO ACCOUNTS OF KIDD TREASURE HUNTS LED BY JOSEPH OR HIS BROTHER

We will now examine two accounts of Kidd treasure digs directed by the sons of Joseph Smith, Sr. Both are highly typical of treasure hunting accounts

101. Dictated letter of Stephen S. Harding to Thomas Gregg, February 1882, in Thomas Gregg, *The Prophet of Palmyra* (New York: John B. Alden, 1890), 35, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:153-4.

102. Ann Ruth Eaton, *The Origin of Mormonism* (Woman's Executive Committee of Home Missions, 1881), cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:148.

103. John Ahmanson, *Secret History*, trans. Gleason Archer (Chicago: Moody, 1984 [1876]), 90.

104. W[illiam]. R. Hine in Arthur Deming, *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, January 1888, 2, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:182-84.

105. K. E. Bell's affidavit, May 1885, in Arthur B. Deming, *Naked Truths about Mormonism*, 3, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:179.

from that time. The first account relates to Joseph Smith, Jr., and comes from Palmyra native Philetus B. Spear, recorded c. 1873:

No one could find it unless digging in the night. When they came near the devil would frighten them away. Hey [sic] must never mind him but dig on, or he would drag the treasure down deeper.

The men worked hard and long but saw no signs of gold, when Mr. Ellsworth, growing convinced of his folly, determined to play a joke upon his comrades. Going to the hill before the others, he scattered a train of powder around. About midnight, when the men were thinking of the signs that might come any moment, Ellsworth dropped his pipe on the powder. As it flashed, he shouted, "The Devil is coming! The Devil is Coming!" when one and all ran for dear life.¹⁰⁶

Spear's statement about the actions of Ellsworth (tentatively identified by Dan Vogel as Philip Ellsworth, then in his fifties)¹⁰⁷ is very interesting but probably naïve. The directing seer at treasure digs usually needed the secret assistance of one or more helpers. Daniel Pierce Thompson, for example, introduced us to the associate of Gow, who rushed into the midst of the money-diggers in the costume of a specter with its throat cut. But there might also have been a plant among the group of diggers themselves, someone who would break the ceremonially imposed code of silence at the pre-arranged moment when the preternatural fireworks were set to begin. This usually took the form of some exclamation of surprise or alarm.¹⁰⁸ It is hard not to suspect that Ellsworth was a plant of the latter kind, who only gave the excuse reported by Spear after being inadvertently caught in the act.

Within a month-and-a-half of the Book of Mormon's first public appearance on the shelves of Grandin's bookstore in Palmyra, an article appeared in the *Rochester Gem* (May 15, 1830) describing an attempt by one of the Smith sons at finding Kidd's treasure. It is not clear whether the "oracle" referred to is Joseph or one of his brothers:

Numbers flocked to him to test his skill, and the first question among a certain class was, if there was any of [Captain William] Kidd's money hid in these parts in the earth. The oracle, after adjusting the stone in his hat, and looking in upon it some-

106. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:130. The account says that Joseph Smith then organized another company, and "It was while digging with this second company that Smith claimed to find the Gold Bible" (130-31). This statement agrees with the one quoted earlier from John Ahmanson (*Secret History*, 90), which also said that Smith discovered the plates while looking for Kidd's treasure.

107. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:130 n1.

108. See the examples of exclamations to break ceremonial silence in Alan Taylor, "Early Republic's Supernatural Economy: Treasure Seeking in the American Northeast, 1780-1830," *American Quarterly* 38 (Spring 1986): 12. However, Taylor views these exclamations as unplanned responses on the part of the diggers, rather than pre-arranged signals.

time, pronounced that there was. The question of where, being decided upon, there forthwith emerged a set, armed with "pick-axe, hoe, and spade," out into the mountains, to dislodge the treasure. We shall mention but one man of the money-diggers. His name was Northrop. . . Northrop and his men sallied out upon the hills east of the river, and commenced digging—the night was chosen for operation—already had two nights been spent in digging, and the third commenced upon, when Northrop with his pick-axe struck the chest! The effect was powerful, and contrary to an explicit rule laid down by himself he exclaimed, "d—n me, I've found it!"

The charm was—scream of demons,—the chattering of spirits—the hissing of serpents rent the air, and the treasure moved! The oracle was again consulted, who said that it had removed to Deep Hollow. (Vogel's bracketed words)¹⁰⁹

A MURDERED-TREASURE GUARDIAN GHOST AT JOSEPH SMITH'S 1826 TRIAL

Apart from the accounts of the earlier version of the Moroni story, the most significant piece of evidence suggesting that Joseph Smith, Jr., both knew and exploited the motif of the murdered treasure-guardian ghost came to light in testimony given at Joseph's March 20, 1826 Bainbridge glass-looking trial. One of the witnesses, Jonathan Thompson, testified that on one occasion, when Joseph was asked to consult his stone again to get a better fix on the location of the treasure chest they were seeking, he refused, "on account of the circumstances relating to the trunk being buried came all fresh to his mind; that the last time that he looked, he discovered distinctly the two Indians who buried the trunk; that a quarrel ensued between them, and *that one of said Indians was killed by the other, and thrown into the hole beside of the trunk, to guard it, as he supposed*" [italics added].¹¹⁰ The incident is reminiscent of a Kidd story associated with Wethersfield, Connecticut. While burying some treasure at Tyrone's Landing in the neighborhood of that town, Kidd "in anger killed one of his mates with a water bucket, whose ghost still keeps watch."¹¹¹

CONCLUSION

The angel Moroni began his career as a type of murdered treasure-guardian ghost particularly (though not exclusively) associated with the story of Captain Kidd's treasure. Smith must have learned of the motif while helping his father dig for Kidd's treasure and while studying Kidd's life and lore as a boy. That

109. "Imposition and Blasphemy!!-Money Diggers, &c.," *Rochester Gem*, May 15, 1830, 2:15, cited in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:272-3.

110. "Mormons," *New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1883), 2:1576. Cf. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 4:254.

111. Dorson, *Jonathan Draws the Long Bow*, 175-76.

Joseph Smith, Jr., knew the motif and could have employed it is confirmed by the 1826 testimony of Jonathan Thompson, who heard him use it while digging treasure with him. That Smith used it again in the earlier of the two versions of the story of the finding of the plates is strongly implied in the account of Joseph and Heil Lewis, and is stated directly in that of Fayette Lapham. Smith's choice of the Kidd motif may have been motivated by the fact that among traditional preternatural treasure guardians, only the murdered treasure-guardian ghost was, as an innocent victim, morally neutral—that is to say not necessarily evil. When Moroni became an angel during the shift between earlier and later versions of the story, the motif ceased being relevant.