

SECRET SOCIETIES AND THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF JOSEPH SMITH'S REWRITTEN SCRIPTURE

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The rise of anti-Masonry was a significant historical and political occurrence in the United States in the late 1820s while Joseph Smith, Jr. worked on the Book of Mormon in 1829.¹ Scholars often invoke anti-Masonry as crucial early nineteenth-century context for understanding the composition of Smith's early scriptural projects, and even early believers in Smith's claims saw and understood these connections.² For instance, Martin Harris, one of Smith's associates, stated that the Book of Mormon was an "anti-Masonick Bible" soon after the book's publication.³ Outsiders also understood that the book engaged in these

1. Joseph Smith, Jr., *The Book of Mormon* (E. B. Grandin, 1830); David G. Hackett, *That Religion to Which All Men Agree: Freemasonry in American Culture* (University of California Press, 2014), 111–24; Spencer W. McBride and Jennifer Hull Dorsey, eds., *New York's Burned-Over District: A Documentary History* (Cornell University Press, 2023). Quotations from the Book of Mormon in this article are from the 1830 edition. I include the current chapter and verse system used by the Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for ease of reference.

2. Massimo Introvigne, "Freemasonry and New Religious Movements," in *Handbook of Freemasonry*, edited by Henrik Bogdan and Jan A.M. Snoek, Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion 8 (Brill, 2014), 308–9; and Dan Vogel, "Mormonism's 'Anti-Masonick Bible,'" *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 9 (1989): 17–30.

3. *Geauga Gazette*, Mar. 15, 1831; and Dan Vogel, "Mormonism's 'Anti-Masonick Bible.'"

broadier political and social issues. One newspaper, reprinting a short article from the *Geauga Gazette*, noted that, “The Mormon Bible is Antimasonic, and it is a singular truth that every one of its followers, so far as we are able to ascertain, are antimasons.”⁴ These observations raise the question of the connection of the rhetoric of anti-Masonry with the broader discourse about secret societies during the period from the founding of the United States to the 1820s.

I will argue that anti-Masonry is not the only important context to consider when analyzing the composition of both the Book of Mormon and Smith’s additions to Genesis 1–6 in the Book of Moses. The broader movement against secret societies in the wake of the French Revolution and the literature that accompanied it in the transatlantic world of early America provides that crucial context, when anti-Jacobinism played such a major role in the formation of early American national identity. Born out of the French Revolution, Jacobinism was viewed by many Americans as the archenemy of order and good government.⁵ Purely anarchistic in nature, Jacobin history was believed to have brought the downfall of civilizations since the Miltonic War in Heaven prior to the creation of the world.⁶ The political and social turmoil caused by the transatlantic revolutions inspired new applications of the Eden narrative in America that would inform how Smith and his contemporaries used and interpreted the story themselves. For Smith this would mean that the Eden of the Book of Mormon would reflect some of these social and political shifts. Smith would rewrite the story of Adam and Eve as

4. “Antimasonic Religion,” *The Ohio Star*, Mar. 24, 1831.

5. Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

6. “Barruel Amended, No. 1,” *Commercial Advertiser*, Oct. 21, 1799, 2; “Barruel Amended, No. 2,” *Commercial Advertiser*, Oct. 23, 1799, 3. The *Commercial Advertiser*, originally titled the *American Minerva*, was founded by Noah Webster in 1793. See Joseph J. Ellis, *After the Revolution: Profiles of Early American Culture* (W. W. Norton, 1979), 198.

well as the Cain and Abel story so that Genesis 1–6 would address the role secret societies play in the world.

Eden and Anti-Jacobinism

The biblical Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel were important figures in long eighteenth-century political theorizing about good government. Many authors in the transatlantic world found these myths to be a place to trace the genealogy of different forms of government, both good and bad. Between the years 1797 and 1799 and while in exile in Britain, the French cleric Abbé Barruel published his four-volume *Memoirs, Illustrating the History of Jacobinism*, which purported to expose the history and crimes of the Jacobins.⁷ Before Americans collectively understood the phrase “secret combinations” as an allusion to Freemasonry, conservative American patriots had been fighting against a mostly imaginary enemy that in reality had been an open and public social and political club in France in the wake of the French Revolution.⁸ A series of myths were built up around the Jacobins that centered on all of the very worst of the acts of revolutionaries like Robespierre and his associates in the National Convention. Fear of a populist uprising that could destroy the hard-earned unity of the early republic fueled the development of early American political action against secret societies.⁹ By the late

7. Abbé Barruel, *Memoirs, Illustrating the History of Jacobinism, A Translation from the French of the Abbe Barruel*, 4 vols. (Printed for the Author, 1797–1799).

8. Patrice Higonnet, *Goodness Beyond Virtue: Jacobins during the French Revolution* (Harvard University Press, 1998).

9. For the classic treatment of this history, see Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (1965; Vintage Books, 2008); and David Brion Davis, *The Fear of Conspiracy: Images of Un-American Subversion from the Revolution to the Present* (Cornell University Press, 1971). See also Bryan Waterman, “The Bavarian Illuminati, the Early American Novel, and Histories of the Public Sphere,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., vol. 62, no. 1 (2005): 9–30.

1820s conservative Americans were well equipped to organize into a new movement against their perceived enemies, Freemasons, and to rapidly create a strong anti-Masonic movement.¹⁰

The Jacobins were a political debate club that grew out of the French Revolution to eventually include chapters in several nations, including France, Germany, Britain, the United States, and elsewhere in the 1790s.¹¹ Conservative commentators had already begun to blame the French Revolution on the Illuminati, a similar club founded in Bavaria a couple of decades prior that had been shut down by the elector of Bavaria, Karl Theodor. According to Michael Lienesch, “As early as 1793 pamphlets were being printed that purported to expose the [Illuminati] Order, which was described as alive and more active than ever, secretly recruiting Freemasons, reformers, and writers to the revolutionary cause.”¹² This larger theorized plot to destroy European governments and rid the countries of conservatism was then tied to the Jacobins, and, as Lienesch goes on to describe, all of the pseudohistories and conspiracies regarding the Illuminati, Freemasons, and the Jacobins were synthesized into one grand “history” by the Abbé Barruel in his *Memoirs*. Lienesch explains how “for Barruel . . . the Jacobins were only the last in a long line of villains, and the Revolution was but the present phase of a much more deeply laid and larger plan, a campaign whose

10. Both the larger fears of conspiracy and the existing print networks helped anti-Masonic newspapers to represent “an astonishing one-eighth of the nation’s newspapers” in 1830. Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730–1840* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 184.

11. Eckhart Hellmuth, “Towards a Comparative Study of Political Culture: The Cases of Late Eighteenth-Century England and Germany,” in *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century*, edited by Eckhart Hellmuth (Oxford University Press, 1990), 23–24.

12. Michael Lienesch, “The Illusion of the Illuminati: The Counterconspiratorial Origins of Post-Revolutionary Conservatism,” in *Revolutionary Histories: Transatlantic Cultural Nationalism, 1775–1815*, edited by W. M. Verhoeven (Palgrave, 2002), 155.

aim was the destruction of religion, monarchy, and society itself.”¹³ For Barruel, the threat this campaign offered did not just apply to religion, government, and society in Europe. Instead, he explicitly warned the new republic in America that the Jacobins (and Illuminati and Freemasons) were preparing to overthrow the United States as well. This was a long battle that all societies would have to face, and at its heart it was satanic.

Many of Barruel’s first readers connected the historical chronology he claimed to reconstruct with their own readings of biblical history, some going back to the earliest history in the Book of Genesis. The same year that Barruel’s last volume was published, an anonymous American book review sought to praise Barruel’s work on the origins of Jacobinism and also extend his history in a lengthy review titled “Barruel Amended.” The reviewer described what were, from their perspective, the true biblical origins of Jacobinism.¹⁴ According to this anonymous author, Jacobinism did not begin in France in 1789 but instead in the War in Heaven they believed was depicted in Jude 1:6, Revelation 12, and Isaiah 14. These themes are best described in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, since, as the author states, “Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, is the finest satire upon Jacobinism, in the English language.”¹⁵ According to this reviewer, the real origins of Jacobinism go back to when Satan or Lucifer led one-third of the host of heaven away from the righteous government of God. This was the crucial first step, but Satan had to introduce Jacobinism into the newly created world after the War in Heaven as well.

There were other points that linked the Jacobins’ rebellion against good government to their Satanic origins. The author describes when Satan deceived Eve in Eden to get Adam and Eve to rebel against God and be expelled from the garden. Satan is “that arch Jacobin,” the one

13. Lienesch, “Illusion of the Illuminati,” 155–56.

14. “Barruel Amended, No. 1,” 2.

15. “Barruel Amended, No. 1,” 3.

that “raised an insurrection in Heaven.”¹⁶ The serpent was either Satan himself or a pupil or emissary. In any case, the motive behind the deception seems clear to the reviewer: “It is true that in many instances, the Jacobin who attacks the possessor of wealth and office, does it because he wishes and expects to obtain the same advantages; but the history of Jacobinism furnishes parallel instances of men who plot day and night, to ruin the happiness of others, when they have no idea of ever coming in possession of it themselves. That is they do mischief for the sake of mischief.”¹⁷ Jacobinism, then, is anarchic, chaotic, and loaded with jealousy over the property or possessions that others have but they do not have themselves.¹⁸

Part of the reason that late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century political theorists opposed the Jacobins was that they believed Jacobins had an inverted view of liberty. In this religious reading of their origins, Satan is the arch democrat, acting just like a Jacobin when he assumes the role of a friend in approaching Adam and Eve as if he only wanted to help them to be at liberty. According to Barruel’s reviewer, it was also a classic Jacobin move for Satan to go after Eve, “the person most credulous, most easily deluded by his fascinating speeches.”¹⁹ This was not only about gender. The reviewer believed that working-class men and women were taken advantage of by Jacobins just the same as Eve fell so easily to Satan.²⁰ From this perspective, people of the lower classes were

16. “Barruel Amended, No. 2,” 3.

17. “Barruel Amended, No. 2,” 3. Jacobins were similarly described as servants of Satan in the *Gazette of the United States and Daily Evening Advertiser*, Mar. 23, 1795, 3.

18. Matthijs Lok, *Europe Against Revolution: Conservatism, Enlightenment, and the Making of the Past* (Oxford University Press, 2023), 87–89.

19. “Barruel Amended, No. 2,” 3.

20. The reviewer remarked that Satan was likely only able to deceive Eve because she was “absent from her husband, who might defeat his insidious wiles.” “Barruel Amended, No. 2,” 3.

not being helped by Jacobins in France of the 1790s but were instead being taken advantage of because of their lack of training and knowledge. The author believed that calls to “liberty” and “democracy” were Jacobinic, and thus satanic in origin. Pointing out wealth inequality and class conflict was seen as a smoke screen for the true intentions of the Jacobins, which were to either profit off of the destruction of the current government or to make everybody miserable, especially the wealthy, like they themselves were.²¹

Besides the War in Heaven and the Fall, this anti-Jacobin review makes another biblical genealogy of the origins of the Jacobins. In order to get what they want, Jacobins “rob, steal, plunder, and cut throats.”²² This murderous bent of the Jacobin is seen, according to the reviewer, most clearly in the story of Cain and Abel. Satan is a “foreign intruder,” advising against following the laws and government.²³ A satanic Jacobinism then worked through Cain to influence him to secretly plot against his brother Abel because Abel had the favor of God—the head of the government—and property that Cain did not have. Cain killed Abel in the field because of jealousy and the fact that he was miserable after God rejected his offering. According to Barruel’s reviewer, Jacobins of the Romantic period were just like Cain and were essentially servants of Satan.²⁴

21. In England in the 1790s, these issues became so serious during the war with France that radicals could potentially be charged with treason and sentenced to death. Carl B. Cone, *The English Jacobins: Reformers in Late 18th Century England* (1968; Routledge, 2017), 159.

22. “Barruel Amended, No. 2,” 3.

23. “Barruel Amended, No. 3,” *Commercial Advertiser*, Oct. 25, 1799, 3. This is likely a reference to the Jacobin clubs formed in America in the 1790s, initially from French Jacobins moving to the United States and attempting to extend the movement from France across the Atlantic.

24. Lok, *Europe Against Revolution*, 247–48.

For this reviewer, it was obvious that Jacobinism had at its root all of the worst of modern and ancient politics. Jacobinism, democracy, and calls for liberty, equality, and freedom were blatant deceptions and their origins were satanic. Beyond individual identity formation, particularly if one identified as anything like a Jacobin in the early republic, this depiction of reality had serious implications for the development of national identity. According to the reviewer, the new United States had to be as cautious about Jacobins as if they themselves had been among the host of heaven who had been approached to join Lucifer's insurrection, or if they had been Eve and were invited by the serpent to eat from the tree, or if they had been Abel and were made aware of the danger posed by Cain. Not only were American lives at stake in the early republic, the future destiny of the nation could be in ruins if Jacobins or those fighting for democracy were allowed to be in control or to work in secret to gain power.

Numerous publications during this period regularly used the term "secret combination(s)" to describe the inner workings of the Jacobin movement.²⁵ A brief commentary on the political moment in the *Vermont Courier* in 1834 is representative. The author of the note claims that he had at one time not found the notion that there were secret societies working in the dark very convincing, but his mind recently changed. According to the author, "Demagogues are getting up secret clubs all over the state, to tamper with the suffrages of a free people.— One of these Jacobin coteries held a meeting in this village a short time since. . . . High officers from abroad, and a leading member of one of our churches . . . were present at this political junket on sabbath-night!!! These demagogues have entered into a 'Secret Combination' to do that, which they dare not do in the open day!"²⁶ All of the elements of the

25. See "For the Watchman. No. II. *To the Freemen of Vermont*," *The Watchman*, Aug. 25, 1809, 2; and "The Political Monitor—No. II," *Dedham Gazette*, Apr. 8, 1814, 4.

26. *Vermont Courier*, Aug. 22, 1834, 3.

fear of secret societies are here in this brief notice. Secret combinations of Jacobins, in secret meetings after dark (even held on the Sabbath), were being set up to destroy local government, religion, and society. Patriotic early Americans would resist these secret groups and their violence and focus on engaging society and government during the day, out in the open, and in ways that eschewed violence.

Many anti-Jacobin early Americans wanted to warn their new nation of the potential dangers that secret societies posed to their country. In another example from 1796, “an old Farmer” sent “A Caution to the Citizens of America” that was published in the *Albany Register*. After offering a rereading of the Genesis story, where the serpent’s argument is given greater length in the voice of a Jacobin, the “old Farmer” goes through a list of biblical stories where characters murder for gain. According to the author, “The time would fail to tell how Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and all their followers, perished in attempting to overthrow Moses; and how Absalom, though the murderer of his brother, could by his wicked dissimulation, steal the hearts of his venerable father’s subjects to that degree as to nearly overthrow his kingdom—and how Hazael could kill his master that he might reign in his stead—and for more recent examples of the like kind, we could tell how the Jacobins in France misled the people so as to make them mistake their friends for their enemies.”²⁷ This larger conservative movement against secret societies was not monolithic but instead represented a variety of ideas and approaches to the political and historical moment that these early American authors found themselves within, but these different readings of Jacobinism into the biblical text share much of what we find in Smith’s rewriting of the Eden and post-Eden text of Genesis. Contextualizing the ways that Joseph Smith interacted with the text of Genesis in his revisionary project of the Bible through the larger genre of anti-Jacobin literature helps us to

27. An Old Farmer, “A Caution to the Citizens of America,” *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia, PA), Jan. 27, 1796, 2.

better understand the broader theological and political undertaking that Smith was engaging in.²⁸ Suffice it to say that for the reviewer of Barruel's four-volume work, and for Smith, the vitality of civilization and Christianity was at stake if secret societies like the Jacobins were allowed to destroy and ultimately end it.

The Book of Mormon and Anti-Jacobinism

Political commentary was never far from the overall story of the Book of Mormon's thousand-year history of a group that emigrated from Jerusalem to the New World circa 600 BCE. Upon arrival the group splits into two factions and becomes two nations after the death of the patriarch of the family, a visionary prophet named Lehi who led his wife, children, and the family of a man named Ishmael away from their homeland. The two groups, the Nephites (the fair-skinned protagonists) and Lamanites (the dark-skinned antagonists of the Nephites), are constantly battling each other throughout the narrative, culminating in the eventual annihilation of the Nephites circa 400 CE.

Joseph Smith Jr. dictated the text of the Book of Mormon during the late winter of 1828 and into the spring of 1829. Like anti-Jacobin literature, the Book of Mormon uses the fall to reflect on themes of liberty and to describe the deceptions of Satan. At points throughout the narrative of the Book of Mormon, Smith brought together Isaiah 14, Revelation 12, and Genesis 3 in order to understand the identity of the

28. On this broader genre, see M. O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2001). On Jacobin ideas, see Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780–1805* (Oxford University Press, 1976); Nancy E. Johnson, *The English Jacobin Novel on Rights, Property and the Law: Critiquing the Contract* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); and Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background, 1760–1830* (Oxford University Press, 1981).

serpent that “beguiles” Eve.²⁹ This serpent convinces Eve to not only eat the forbidden fruit herself but also persuade Adam to eat it as well. It was common for Christians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to weave these verses together to describe a War in Heaven, particularly in a milieu that was saturated with Miltonic biblical interpretation.³⁰ Though the Book of Mormon does not describe a war in heaven, it does describe Satan’s fall from heaven, reading this larger Christian tradition—and Milton’s rewriting of it in *Paradise Lost*—into the Book of Genesis. Lehi, the grandfather of all Nephites and Lamanites, explains that he is convinced by “the things which I have read . . . that an angel of God, according to that which is written, had fallen from Heaven.”³¹ This angel-turned-devil from Revelation 12 became miserable and, in the next sentence, wanted to make everyone else miserable as well. In order to do that he convinced Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, which in turn caused them to be expelled from the garden.³²

In a November 6, 1802, letter to the editor of the London-based *Anti-Jacobin Review*, “E. O. J.” provides an allegorical reading of the Garden of Eden and the Fall. In the allegory, the garden is the Christian Church, the tree of knowledge of good and evil is the approach to understanding the Old Testament by scholars like Herder and Geddes (whose work was popular among Jacobins), the serpent tempting

29. These three chapters were routinely brought together to form a depiction of Satan in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. For example, see Daniel Defoe, *The Political History of the Devil*, 6th ed. (Printed for W. Strahan, J. and F. Rivington, W. Nicoll, and S. Bladon, 1770), 34–35; and Thomas C. Upham, *Jahn’s Biblical Archaeology* (Flagg and Gould, 1823), 226.

30. See George F. Sensabaugh, *Milton in Early America* (Princeton University Press, 1964); K. P. Van Anglen, *The New England Milton: Literary Reception and Cultural Authority in the Early Republic* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993); and Keith W. F. Stavely, *Puritan Legacies: Paradise Lost and the New England Tradition, 1630–1890* (Cornell University Press, 1987).

31. Smith, *Book of Mormon*, 64 (2 Ne. 2:17).

32. Smith, *Book of Mormon*, 64 (2 Ne. 2:18–19).

Eve is the Jacobin periodical *The Monthly Review*, and the angel that “drove Adam and Eve out of Paradise, *might be* a type of the Anti-Jacobin Review chastising those Christians who have adopted such interpretations!”³³ Anti-Jacobins equated Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the garden with a warning against the deceptions of the Jacobins, reading the fall as something that might have been avoided if Adam and Eve, like their transatlantic successors, would have heeded the call of more reliable and Christianly information, like that which was published in *The Anti-Jacobin Review*.

While also wanting to get these same Christians to heed its own warning, the Book of Mormon takes a different approach to understanding whether or not it would have been preferable for Adam and Eve to stay in the garden for all time. Lehi argues that if Adam and Eve had not fallen and been expelled from Eden they would not have had children and would have “remained in the same state which they were, after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end . . . they would have had no children . . . they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy, for they knew no misery: doing no good, for they knew no sin.”³⁴ In an exclamation in verse 25 that has had great influence in the reception history of the Book of Mormon, Lehi states, “Adam fell, that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.”³⁵ The purpose of man’s creation—to have joy—is destroyed under the government of Jacobins. As one British anti-Jacobin put it in 1793, Jacobins, whether in France or England, “were making rapid strides to

33. E. O. J., “To the Editor,” *Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine*, Dec. 1802, 439–43.

34. Smith, *Book of Mormon*, 65 (2 Ne. 2:22–24).

35. Smith, *Book of Mormon*, 65 (2 Ne. 2:25). On the influence of verse 25, for example, the LDS Scripture Citation Index lists 141 uses of 2 Ne. 2:25 in speeches by LDS general authorities from the present back to Joseph Smith. This only includes a small group of mostly men in the hierarchy and does not include the influence on the general population of Mormonism. See Scripture Citation Index, accessed Dec. 10, 2024, <https://scriptures.byu.edu>.

involve us in a state of misery and confusion.”³⁶ The Book of Mormon’s focus on the idea that Satan wanted humans to share in his misery parallels the anti-Jacobin argument that Jacobins, through Satan’s influence, were seeking the same thing.

The rewriting of the Eden narrative and expulsion from the garden in the Book of Mormon goes beyond the story of Adam and Eve. Just as important to the major narrative arc of the Book of Mormon is the idea that since the beginning of time, Satan, the “father of all lies,” has been instructing corrupt or wicked individuals like Cain to know “secret combination(s)” in order to gain financially or politically, to get revenge, or make people miserable like himself.³⁷ All throughout the Book of Mormon, Smith alluded to the idea that “secret combinations” pose a threat to society and have been the downfall of many past civilizations.³⁸ One key example of the rewriting of the Cain and Abel story in the Book of Mormon is the Gadianton Robbers. By the time the reader of the Book of Mormon makes it to Helaman, this group of robbers or banditti has already caused major problems for the Nephite civilization.³⁹ In the Book of Helaman, Satan “did plot with Cain, that if he would murder his brother Abel, it should not be known unto the

36. Thomas Moore, *An Address to the Inhabitants of Great Britain on the Dangerous and Destructive Tendency of the French System of Liberty and Equality* (G. Peacock, 1793), 28.

37. The phrase “secret combination(s)” appears eighteen times in the Book of Mormon, and the phrase “the combinations of the devil” appears once.

38. I will analyze many of these in the rest of this essay below.

39. Although never directly referred to as “bandits” or “banditti” in the Book of Mormon, the Gadianton Robbers are labelled a “band” numerous times. Smith, *Book of Mormon*, 408, 410, 411, 423, 424, 425, 428, 431, 436, 437, 438 (Hel. 1:12; 2:3–6, 8, 10, 11; 6:18, 21, 22, 24, 37; 7:25; 8:1, 28; 11:2, 10, 26, 28, 30). Deriving largely from the artwork of Salvator Rosa, images of banditti appear frequently in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century transatlantic literature. Erin Mackie, *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates: The Making of the Modern Gentleman in the Eighteenth Century* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 181.

world. And he did plot with Cain and his followers, from that time forth.”⁴⁰ It is precisely through these satanic methods that the Gadianton Robbers cause the most anarchic violence against the Nephites. This concept is dependent on unique early American mistrust of secret societies and political and social radicalism in the wake of the French Revolution based on a particular reading of Cain’s action of murdering his brother Abel.

In particular, although the entirety of the Book of Mormon relies on a version of Eden that includes Cain making oaths with Satan, clarifying a major literary issue that has perplexed readers for millennia, there is nothing in the text-critical history of Genesis 3–4 to suggest this relationship between Cain and Satan.⁴¹ It is simply unknown why the author of Gen. 2:4b–4:26 decided to depict God as accepting Abel’s offering and rejecting Cain’s. On the other hand, there are clear examples in the political literature of the early republic, particularly in the wake of the French Revolution and the demonization of Thomas Paine and Jacobinism, that provide important context to the stories about “secret combinations” among the Gadianton Robbers. These religio-political motifs provided a backdrop that would fulfill Smith’s need to describe the way that civilizations can collapse, an integral aspect of the Book of Mormon’s description of the fall of Nephite civilization.

In the Book of Mormon, this interpretation of the Cain and Abel story is extended in a passage in the Book of Ether. Ether is a small addition to the text of the Book of Mormon—a story within a story, a common literary technique in long eighteenth-century transatlantic literature—that follows a narrative outside the thousand-year history

40. Smith, *Book of Mormon*, 424 (Hel. 6:27).

41. Ronald Hendel, *Genesis 1–11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Yale University Press, 2024), 239–40.

of the battles between the Nephites and Lamanites.⁴² Heightening the disconnect between history and the story of the Book of Mormon, this group came to the New World soon after the confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel described in Genesis 11. The narrative describes how a man named Jared and his brother, only known in the book as the brother of Jared, leave the ancient Near East, build boats, and cross the oceans to the Western Hemisphere. Once settled, the family creates great civilizations that end up fighting and killing each other just like the Nephites and Lamanites. Most significant for the focus of this article is the idea in Ether that “secret combinations” bring the downfall of civilizations, particularly beginning with the daughter of Jared, a different Jared than the one previously mentioned in the Book of Ether.

The allusions to the Cain and Abel story in Ether warn about the potential evil power of secret combinations, and the passage says in part: “And Akish did administer unto them the oaths which was given by them of old, who also sought power, which had been handed down even from Cain, who was a murderer from the beginning.”⁴³ Smith’s revision of the Bible alludes to Book of Mormon passages like this one in Ether when Smith has the Lord say in his revision of Genesis to Cain, “It shall be said in times to come that these abominations was had from|cain for he rejected the greater counsel which was had from God.”⁴⁴ The warning found in Ether represents an important turning point in a small narrative arc in the book that will lead to the destruction of the Jaredite nation.

42. Katherine Binhammer, “The Story Within the Story of Sentimental Fiction,” *Narrative* 25, no. 1 (2017): 45–64; Clayton Carlyle Tarr, *Gothic Stories Within Stories: Frame Narratives and Realism in the Genre, 1790–1900* (McFarland, 2017).

43. Smith, *Book of Mormon*, 553 (Ether 8:15).

44. Joseph Smith, “Old Testament Revision 1,” 9 (Moses 5:25), The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/old-testament-revision-1/11>.

In this narrative, a wicked prince named Jared usurps his father's throne and places the king in jail. His brothers, angry at his actions, fight against him and destroy his army. The kingdom is returned to the rightful king and Jared's life is spared, but he is brooding over the fact that the kingdom was taken from him. His daughter approaches him with a plan where she will dance for a man named Akish, who she believed would want, after seeing her dance, to ask her father to allow him to marry her. This would allow Jared to request "the head of . . . the king" in return.⁴⁵ His daughter asks the rhetorical question, assuming that he had read their shared version of the Book of Genesis: "Hath he [her father] not read the record which our fathers brought across the great deep? Behold, is there not an account concerning them of old, that they by their secret plans did obtain kingdoms and great glory?"⁴⁶ Jared's daughter learned how to be cunning and devise a plan to take back power by reading similar stories in an apparent early version of the Cain and Abel episode.

Later in the passage, she explains that these oaths or secret plans had been handed down since Cain.⁴⁷ Smith retrojects this unique rewriting of Cain and Abel into the Book of Mormon narrative at a time around the Babylonian exile, when he believed a group of lost Israelites might have had some of the five books of Moses like that in the Book of Mormon. Taking it further, he places at least the beginning stories of Genesis into the hands of another group in the New World that had been disconnected from the ancient Near East since the Tower of Babel, which Smith's contemporaries would have dated to sometime

45. Smith, *Book of Mormon*, 553 (Ether 8:10). There are obvious connections between this story and the New Testament story of Herodias using her daughter to dance for her husband Herod and convince him to kill John the Baptist. See Matthew 14 and Mark 6. The idea in Smith's revision of Genesis (Moses 5:50) that someone would scheme and kill for "the oath's sake" is found only in Matt. 14:9 and Mark 6:26.

46. Smith, *Book of Mormon*, 553 (Ether 8:9).

47. Smith, *Book of Mormon*, 553 (Ether 8:15).

in the third millennium BCE.⁴⁸ The secret oaths and combinations that Jared's daughter introduces to Akish create an underground society of murderers and assassins willing to kill for power, money, and the society that made them swear oaths, but the desire for power sometimes overrides loyalty to members of the secret group. Another part of the Book of Ether also alludes to the actions "of the ancients," that is, Cain, Lamech, and others who began the secret oaths with Satan.⁴⁹ In this passage, only two chapters after the story about Jared and his daughter, a group of robbers appear in the Jaredite land that "administered oaths after the manner of the ancients."⁵⁰ Akish, Jared's new son-in-law, later kills his father-in-law in order to take the throne, and violence in the kingdom eventually brings not only its downfall but also the end of the Jaredite civilization itself.

All that is left of their society by the time the Nephite people find their remains are bones, ruins, rusted metal swords, breastplates, and twenty-four plates of gold that have writing on them.⁵¹ These ruins of Jaredite civilization draw on fears of the loss of civilization in the transatlantic world of the early nineteenth century.⁵² The Jaredites are described this way in order to focus on the perceived potential negative outcomes in the early United States of allowing secret societies to become normative within Western civilization. The new American republic had to be especially wary of groups like the Jacobins or Masons,

48. Charles Buck, *A Theological Dictionary* (Joseph J. Woodward, 1826), 112.

49. Smith, *Book of Mormon*, 555 (Ether 9:5).

50. Smith, *Book of Mormon*, 561 (Ether 10:33).

51. Smith, *Book of Mormon*, 172 (Mosiah 8:8–11).

52. John Havard, *Late Romanticism and the End of Politics: Byron, Mary Shelley, and the Last Men* (Cambridge University Press, 2023); Jason T. Sharples, *The World That Fear Made: Slave Revolts and Conspiracy Scares in Early America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020); John Hay, *Postapocalyptic Fantasies in Antebellum American Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2017); John Howard Smith, *A Dream of the Judgment Day: American Millennialism and Apocalypticism, 1620–1890* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

organizations that might attempt to overthrow the government in the name of anarchy or democracy, and the potential threat of a member of a secret society murdering someone in or out of the group and revealing the group's secret oaths and covenants.⁵³ Early Americans viewed both the Jacobins and the Masons as having the potential to do all of the above. Many Americans believed the Jacobins had committed rampant murder during the Reign of Terror and that Masons had murdered William Morgan.⁵⁴ As described earlier, the Book of Mormon calls upon the Fall, and especially the idea that secret oaths and combinations started with Cain, using similar terminology and filling in the exact same gaps in the biblical record as Smith would revise and clarify as he revised the Bible in 1830, only months after the publication of the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Moses and Anti-Jacobin Themes

After the publication of the Book of Mormon in March 1830, Smith began a large revisionary project on the Bible in June that would continue until mid-1833, when Smith and his associates claimed at the time

53. A good example of a story about a secret group murdering a person because of secret oaths or covenants the group practices is the popular case in the late 1820s of the disappearance of William Morgan. Previously a Mason, Morgan planned on publishing an exposé of Masonry and its secrets, and soon after finding a publisher disappeared in 1826 under mysterious circumstances. It was believed widely by Americans in the early republic to be a clear case of the Masons in New York killing to protect their oaths, brotherhood, and secret rituals. It emboldened Americans of the 1820s and 1830s against Masonry and reminded them of their fear of secret societies. Anti-Masonic political parties and newspapers sprang up all over the United States, and Masons had to go into hiding for several years due to the danger of their lodges and temples being destroyed by mobs. See William Preston Vaughn, *The Antimasonic Party in the United States, 1826–1843* (University Press of Kentucky, 1983), 1–9.

54. David G. Hackett, *That Religion to Which All Men Agree: Freemasonry in American Culture* (University of California Press, 2014), 112–19.

to have completed the project.⁵⁵ During the latter half of 1830, Smith began to edit the version of Eden found in the Book of Mormon into the text of Genesis itself.⁵⁶ This would have provided, if it had been published in full during the 1830s, a version of the Bible for readers of the Book of Mormon that presented the same story of Eden as they encountered throughout the pages of the Book of Mormon. Smith worked on the text that would later become the Book of Moses from that time until February 1831.⁵⁷

Although scholars today argue that the Book of Genesis includes two separate accounts of creation written at different times by different authors centuries after the life of Moses, Smith and the majority of his contemporaries, especially in the United States, read the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 as consistent and written by Moses himself.⁵⁸ As dozens of cases throughout Smith's revision of the Bible highlight, Smith, like other early nineteenth-century Americans, read the Bible harmonistically. Since the Bible was the word of God, it contained no real errors (even though they believed the printed edition in their hands did), enabling Smith to recognize the problems inherent in the transmission history of the Bible but also believe in a perfect or idealized form of the text that he needed to restore. Like scholars of the previous three hundred years, he would utilize a hermeneutic that

55. Robert J. Matthews, "A Plainer Translation": *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible, A History and Commentary* (Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 38–39.

56. Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University, 2004), 63.

57. The Book of Moses is a revision of Genesis only up to chapter six. See Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation*, 63–64; and Michael Hubbard MacKay, Gerrit Dirkmaat, William G. Hartley, Robert J. Woodford, and Grant Underwood, eds., *The Joseph Smith Papers: Documents*, vol. 1, *July 1828–June 1831* (Church Historian's Press, 2013), 150–56.

58. Hendel, *Genesis 1–11*, 4–10.

sought to get back to the earliest version of the text, but he went about his project in the opposite direction by adding to and revising the text through revelation—instead of early manuscript evidence—in order to smooth over and correct the issues he believed had crept into the text over the centuries. Therefore, unlike most other early American Protestants, Smith harmonized the Bible by adding to the text of the Bible itself. The addition of these extra texts to the “word of God” meant the introduction of more passages that would need to be harmonized with one another and the Bible, especially because the Book of Mormon interpreted certain sections of the Bible in ways that varied from traditional readings of the received text or cited versions of passages of the Bible that simply were not in the text itself.

As shown earlier, the creation and fall were one area where the Book of Mormon did not align with the text of Genesis 1–6, but his rewriting of these chapters does connect with many readings of Genesis offered in the broader transatlantic movement against secret societies in the Romantic and early republican period. In his revision of Genesis, Smith transfers the Book of Mormon’s focus on joy and the possibility of never having children from the voice of Lehi to the mouths of Adam and Eve. After Adam and Eve had been expelled from the garden, they came to the same theological conclusion as Lehi about their experience in Smith’s revision.⁵⁹ For Adam the fall was a positive event in this addition because his “eyes are open,” echoing Gen. 3:5 and 7, and that he can now “have joy” “in this life.” Exactly like Lehi, Adam reads the ability to have joy into the experience of the Fall. He and Eve are no longer innocent and are now able to know joy and pain.

In the same addition, Eve picks up on Lehi’s rhetoric at the point where Adam left off. Eve heard Adam’s exclamation about joy and then said, “Were it not for|our transgression we should never had seed &

59. Smith, “Old Testament Revision 1,” 8 (Moses 5:10–11).

should never had known good & evil & the joy of our redemption.”⁶⁰ Eve’s response encapsulates the structure and terminology of Lehi’s statement, moving from the idea of not having children if they had stayed in the garden to the idea that they could only have joy after being expelled from Eden. Eve’s comment that “we should never had seed” parallels Lehi’s “they would have had no children,” following the shift from third person in Lehi’s statement to first person in Eve’s. The suggestion found in the Book of Mormon that children and joy are the most important effects of Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the garden is not found in the KJV text of Genesis, but after Smith revised Genesis 2–4, this specific interpretation of Eden can be found in his revision manuscripts.

Once this version of Eden and the expulsion from the garden were cited throughout the Book of Mormon, Smith felt the need to edit the version of Eden and the Cain and Abel story in the Book of Mormon into the biblical text of Genesis 2–4. Smith understood either consciously or subconsciously after the Book of Mormon had been published that readers of the book would come in constant contact with a depiction of Eden and Cain’s murder of his brother Abel that was simply not in the biblical record. Again, there is no description in Genesis 4 of Cain plotting with Satan in a “secret combination” to kill his brother Abel, but in Smith’s revision of the story we find this plotting added to the story.⁶¹ In June 1830, three months after the publication of the Book of Mormon, Smith would begin to revise the story of Eden in Genesis to incorporate the specific version of Cain found in the Book of Mormon in his Bible revision manuscripts.

In this passage, Satan makes Cain swear by his throat to enter into a covenant with him, and to get his brothers, presumably other

60. Smith, “Old Testament Revision 1,” 8 (Moses 5:11).

61. Smith, “Old Testament Revision 1,” 9 (Moses 5:28–33, 38–39).

children of Adam and Eve besides Abel, to also swear to not tell the secret or else they will die.⁶² If Cain agrees to do this, then Satan swears to “deliver thy brother Abel into thine hands.” Later, Cain glories after he kills Abel because, as he says, “I am free surely the flocks of my brother falleth into my hands.”⁶³ Smith revises the text of Genesis to include the plotting between Cain and Satan alluded to in the book of Helaman, in a way that reflects anti-Jacobin sentiments.⁶⁴ Smith has Cain say that he is “free” after he murders Abel, an idea steeped in the rhetoric against democracy, Jacobinism, and the French Revolution.⁶⁵ Cain is free because his brother can no longer hold him back from the bounty of the flocks he now claims as his own. Just like the Jacobin of the anonymous author of “Barruel Amended,” it is the fact that Abel had possessions and the support of the divine government that Cain allowed pride to turn to envy and hate, which led to his killing Abel.

The Book of Moses also picks up on the theme of secret combinations found in the Book of Mormon’s interpretation of Genesis. In the book of Helaman, part of the purpose of the plotting between Cain and Satan was that Cain’s actions would be hidden from the world.⁶⁶ In Smith’s revision of Genesis, Cain laments that his actions “are not hid

62. According to Thomas Scott, a popular late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century commentator on the Bible, “Adam and Eve had very many more children than are mentioned in this brief narrative; which was principally intended to record a few important particulars, and to trace the history, from the beginning to the time of Moses.” In *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments, According to the Authorized Version; with Explanatory Notes, Practical Observations, and Copious Marginal References*, by Thomas Scott, Rector of Aston Sandford, Bucks, vol. 1 (Samuel T. Armstrong, 1824), 46.

63. Smith, “Old Testament Revision 1,” 9 (Moses 5:33).

64. Smith, *Book of Mormon*, 424 (Hel. 6:27).

65. Lok, *Europe Against Revolution*, 4.

66. Smith, *Book of Mormon*, 424 (Hel. 6:27)

from the Lord.”⁶⁷ Further, Smith used similar wording to describe the actions taken by Cain in his revision of Gen. 4:24–25. Smith revises the text to say that Lamech became a “Master Mahon of that great secret which was administered unto Cain by Satan.”⁶⁸ Apparently, Cain only thought about hiding his secrets from other human beings and did not consider how God would still know about his plotting with Satan to murder his brother Abel. This version of the Cain and Abel story meant to provide a warning to any secret society that thought their wrongdoings would go unpunished; even if they got away with murder, God would be just as aware of what members of the secret societies were doing as he was of Cain killing Abel.

Conclusion

Whether Smith consciously or subconsciously edited the version of Eden as found in the Book of Mormon into the text of Genesis is probably impossible to prove. The point of this article has been to show that, whether or not Smith purposefully edited this version into the Bible to ease the dissonance between the two texts, the simple fact is that his additions and revisions to the Bible harmonized the Eden narrative in both the KJV and the Book of Mormon once he was done editing the text of Genesis 2–4. The added voices of Adam and Eve in his revision of the Bible are synonymous with Lehi’s voice in the second book of Nephi, and the depictions of the secret societies in Helaman and Ether find their way into the text of Genesis 4 as well.⁶⁹ Where there was no “plotting” between Cain and Satan before Smith edited the biblical text, you have a full narrative explaining why Cain’s offering was rejected (i.e., he made the offering at the instruction of Satan, not God)

67. Smith, “Old Testament Revision 1,” 9 (Moses 5:39).

68. Smith, “Old Testament Revision 1,” 10 (Moses 5:49).

69. Smith, *Book of Mormon*, 64 (2 Nephi 2).

as well as how Cain and Satan came up with a plan to get rid of Abel quietly. These additions depend upon specific historical developments in Christian theology leading up to the nineteenth century.⁷⁰ This is not a case of the Book of Mormon using as its source an urtext of Genesis on the Brass Plates nor are the revisions made independently from the Book of Mormon as if Smith was restoring Genesis to its former condition. Instead, both the Book of Mormon and Smith's revision of Genesis 2–4 build upon the English version of Genesis and share the same source in the person that dictated both: Joseph Smith Jr.

Previous scholarship has connected the Book of Mormon description of secret combinations and murders with the American anti-Masonic movement of the late 1820s. While that context is useful in explaining many of the ideas in and verbal connections between the Book of Mormon and the Book of Moses, it does not adequately explain other aspects of these texts. Examples include the idea that the origins of secret societies go back to the Milonic War in Heaven, the fall of Adam and Eve, and Cain's decision to kill Abel. It likewise does not describe the message at the heart of the Book of Mormon: Secret societies lead to the destruction of civilizations, and the young American nation needed to be aware of that danger through the writings of the anti-Jacobins. For this part of the Book of Mormon and the Book of Moses, it is necessary to move from the negative reactions to Masonry in the 1820s back in time to American and transatlantic reactions against the French Revolution in the 1790s and its aftermath. It is this larger transatlantic context that provided the intellectual landscape

70. Contra Noel B. Reynolds, "The Brass Plates Version of Genesis," in *By Study and Also by Faith*, vol. 2, *Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley on the Occasion of his Eightieth Birthday 27 March 1990*, edited by John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 136–73.

to the anti-Masonic movement in America, its language, motifs, and literary, political, and print networks.

Since Smith grew up in the center of this political fighting and was working on his dictation of the Book of Mormon in the middle of it, it is understandable that he would pick up on the broader language and motifs of American angst against these groups in a narrative that he would author. The book would describe the destruction of a thousand-year-old civilization based on the development and success of a secret society inspired by Satan in the same way that he inspired Cain to kill Abel and taught him the ancient, satanic methods of murdering to profit, get revenge, or simply cause anarchic chaos. This message from the Book of Mormon against allowing secret societies to take hold of nations was a warning from Smith to his contemporary Americans—at the same time many anti-Jacobin and anti-Masonic authors were warning about the same thing—to not allow what happened to the ancient white American race, that is, the destruction of their civilization by the dark-skinned ancestors of the Native Americans, to befall the contemporary United States.⁷¹ Once that message

71. Contra Jared Hickman's reading of the Book of Mormon that sees its "Amerindian apocalypse" as "not only undo[ing] the white supremacist apocalypse of many Euro-American biblicists; it opens onto a globalist apocalypse whose standard of judgment is truly ecumenical." Hickman, "Book of Mormon as Amerindian Apocalypse," in *Envisioning Scripture: Joseph Smith's Revelations in their Early American Contexts*, edited by Colby Townsend (Signature Books, 2022), 301–2. Not only does the narrative of the Book of Mormon continue white supremacist ideas by suggesting that wherever Jesus's gospel might be the righteous will be fair skinned and those who convert will turn white (Smith, *Book of Mormon*, 456 [3 Ne. 2:14–15]), it continues and extends the reading of Native Americans as potentially destructive to the new nation. See Jason Colavito, *The Mound Builder Myth: Fake History and the Hunt for a "Lost White Race"* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2020).

was securely placed in the narrative context of the Book of Mormon, its foundations and its ultimate source—the first several chapters of Genesis—needed to support this argument as well. After Smith completed editing Genesis, Smith's new version of the Eden narrative in his revised Genesis could then support the allusions to the stories of Eden and Cain and Abel in the Book of Mormon because they now shared the same, rewritten story.

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