

Oh, What a Beautiful Mormon:

Rodgers and Hammerstein, Intertextuality and *The Book of Mormon*

ABSTRACT:

The 2011 musical The Book of Mormon has been widely recognized for its inclusion of intertextual references. From nods to Star Wars and The Lion King to Bye, Bye Birdie and The Music Man, the production fashions a bricolage of references to a diverse collection of existing texts from across a range of media. One primary source of such referencing, and the focus of this article, is the classic musicals of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. Although the genealogy between The Book of Mormon and the often comforting musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein is not an obvious one, this article analyses the manner in which the production parallels both The Sound of Music (1959) and The King and I (1951), in terms of narrative, in the former, and in terms of orientalist depictions, in the latter. In doing so, it explores the production's reliance on existing materials to put forward the claim that intertextuality is central to an audience's interpretation and reception of this popular musical.

KEY WORDS:

intertextuality; intertextual references; *The Book of Mormon*; Rodgers and Hammerstein; *The Sound of Music*; *The King and I*; Golden Age Musical; Orientalism

MAIN BODY:

As *The Book of Mormon* opened on Broadway in 2011, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints seemed to capitalize on the renewed public interest in their religion. Although the production satirized various religious aspects, often caricaturing Mormon missionaries as young men who ring door bells with cheesy grins, the LDS church unexpectedly supported a musical which lampooned the mythologies and customs of their faith. J. B. Haws suggests in *The Mormon Image in the American Mind*, for example, that the musical 'placed Mormons in a new and, to everyone's surprise, paradoxically positive spotlight' (2013: 244). Despite its often offensive language and subject matter, 'it was the

attention to this play, a play that mercilessly exaggerated every Mormon stereotype, that perhaps gave Mormons themselves an unparalleled opportunity to address those stereotypes' in the cultural sphere (Haws 2013: 244). In accordance with the musical's New York debut, and the protests that were expected to surface, the LDS church issued a single line response: 'The production may attempt to entertain audiences for an evening, but the Book of Mormon as a volume of scripture will change people's lives forever by bringing them closer to Christ' (cited in Haws 2013: 246). Given that religious groups did not protest or lobby the production, the LDS church then released its 'I'm A Mormon' campaign (a paraphrased lyric from the musical) in June 2011, only three months after the musical premiered and the same month it won nine Tony Awards. Dominating New York's taxis, subways and billboards, the campaign capitalized on the city's renewed interest in the Mormon religion in the hope of attracting new members. In addition, the LDS church have purchased advertising space in the playbills and programmes of many subsequent productions, whether on tour or in London or Chicago, with phrases like 'the book is always better' and 'you've seen the play, now read the book' hoping to extend the musical's celebration of faith and courage (cited in Lee 2012).

Despite the often irreverent nature of this increasingly popular musical, which still plays to sold-out audiences today, the musical and the religion from which it stems are often indistinguishable within their marketing schemes. As the London production opened in February 2013, for instance, posters for the religion and the musical appeared concurrently, dominating the London underground as an American import that simultaneously provided 'salvation' and a 'thrilling evening at the theatre'. Beyond the auditorium, then, there exists an intertextual relationship in which audiences are advised, or at least influenced, to interpret the musical in relation to the religious text from which its title derives. In this sense, the LDS

church has capitalized on the success of the production in such a way that various advertising campaigns continue to guide audiences towards the holy text as if it were a popular novel or film. This association therefore demonstrates a form of intertextuality in which audiences are invited to make connections between an established religion and a contemporary stage musical which exploits and satirizes at every turn. In many cases, the musical and the religion are advertised as if related texts from the same popular franchise; intertextually bound and always read in relation to one another. But what is intertextuality? How might *The Book of Mormon* be considered intertextual and to what extent is the placement of intertextual references an inherent part of the musical's structure and dramaturgy?

OH BOY, LIKE LION KING: RELIGION, REFERENCES AND REINVENTION

Developed by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, the creators of the animated sitcom *South Park* (1997-), with Robert Lopez, the co-creator of the puppet musical *Avenue Q* (2003), *The Book of Mormon* is not for the faint-hearted or easily offended. Expanding the satirical edge of *South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut* (1999), the animated film musical which parodied the archetypal musical theatre style, *The Book of Mormon* unites the distasteful humour of *South Park* with the playful musical style of *Avenue Q* to 'offend, provoke laughter, trigger eye-rolling, satirize conventions and [even] warm hearts' (Kennedy 2011). Having attracted a younger, less traditional audience to musical theatre,¹ the production depicts two Mormon missionaries sent on their inaugural mission to Uganda, which, it seems, is nothing like Disney's *The Lion King* (as they had hoped). Instead, the African villagers are plagued by poverty, and the crudely named warlord General Butt-Fucking Naked, to the extent that the pair have little hope of saving the 'natives'. Elder Kevin Price, the successful, driven and, ultimately, selfish missionary, informs Elder Arnold Cunningham, the shy and nerdy sci-fi

fanatic, that he will do ‘something incredible’ on their mission, since Cunningham’s role is simply to tag along (Suskin 2012: 110). As Price walks out on the mission, however, Cunningham decides to convert the villagers himself, despite having never read the holy text. In fashioning his own stories from *Star Wars*, *Star Trek* and *The Lord of the Rings*, Cunningham sways the villagers to find their own Salt Lake City (or Sal Tlay Ka Siti as the local village girl, Nabulungi, calls it). As the musical concludes, the villagers perform Cunningham’s version of the Mormon stories in a surprise pageant for the Mission President’s visit to Uganda. Appalled by Cunningham’s transformation of the Mormon stories, the President orders the Elders to return home and deems their mission a failure. Instead of leaving, however, Price and Cunningham stay in Uganda to find a figurative ‘latter day’ and celebrate an intertextual story of hope and salvation that has been cobbled together from across numerous popular texts.

In order to analyse the inherent intertextuality of this contemporary musical, it is vital to first recognize that this term has no singular or collectively agreed meaning (Allen 2010: 2). Despite being coined by Julia Kristeva to describe the dialogic nature of language in 1966, the term ‘intertextuality’ has since taken on several meanings that are often rather simply surmised as the referencing of one literary, media or social text within another literary, media or social text. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, for instance, describes the term as ‘the need for one text to be read in the light of its allusions to and differences from the content or structure of other texts’ (cited in Hirst 2004: 17), whilst literary theorist Gérard Genette describes it as the ‘actual presence of one text within another’ (1997: 2). The definition of the term intertextuality is thus as fluid and interchangeable as the phenomenon it describes. Although the term is widely used to pinpoint moments in which a text might directly reference another

text, there are multiple types and forms of intertextuality that appear throughout popular culture, particularly in an era where new media technologies are ever complicating the definition of the term 'text'. What is important to consider, then, is the manner in which *The Book of Mormon* uses numerous intertextual devices to challenge perceptions of an often mystified religion by continually referencing popular culture.

Although many audience members are likely to have constructed their interpretation of the musical in relation to the LDS church's reaction to the show and its advertising campaigns, intertextuality is a fundamental facet of the production's performance style more broadly. As many critics noted in their initial reviews, for instance, the musical makes reference to numerous popular musicals, particularly those which premiered in the 1940s, 50s and 60s. Mark Kennedy, for example, acknowledged that the musical maintains the structure and rhythm of a classic musical like *The King and I* (1951) or *The Sound of Music* (1959) (2011). Frank Rich, in addition, wrote in his liner notes to the Original Broadway Cast Recording that the musical is centred around 'the rousing old-time religion of Broadway' in a manner which continually highlights the production's 'old-school' sensibilities (2011). Although the narrative depicts the onslaught of AIDS, poverty and a brutal warlord, the musical makes nods to various 'Golden Age' musicals, from *The Pajama Game* (1954) to *Fiddler on the Roof* (1964). The opening number 'Hello', for example, is cited by Rich as a reminder of 'The Telephone Hour' from *Bye Bye Birdie* (1960), just as Paul Hyde describes 'All-American Prophet' as a throwback to '(Ya Got) Trouble' from *The Music Man* (1957) (2014). Below the musical's contemporary and subversive exterior, therefore, is a type of musical theatre which was presumed to be lost to the 'Golden Age' of the Broadway musical. Through a series of direct intertextual references, the musical seemingly 'recharges' past

conventions for a contemporary audience and slaps the traditional musical comedy back into life (Rich 2011). Although audiences do not require extensive knowledge of the Broadway canon to enjoy the production, as the musical's continued success demonstrates, *The Book of Mormon* capitalizes on the popularity of the musical theatre canon and, in particular, the tropes numerous musicals have long perpetuated.

TERRITORY FOLKS SHOULD STICK TOGETHER: RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN

Although *The Book of Mormon* makes reference to numerous musical comedies, it is the work of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II that is of particular importance to the intertextual framework of this production. Specifically, the musical makes reference to numerous escapist ideologies that appear within their shows, many of which continue to characterize musical theatre as an art form. The formula of 'boy meets girl, they overcome an obstacle and the wider community are united as a result', for instance, continues to influence productions decades after such narratives were first dismissed as sentimental within scholarship (Edney 2007: 942). Their debut work, *Oklahoma!* (1943), for instance, depicts the blossoming romance of cowboy, Curly, and farm girl, Laurey, within a divided community in which the 'farmer and the cowman should be friends' (Hammerstein 2010: 81). In many ways, then, the opening night of *Oklahoma!* signalled the moment in which musical theatre became synonymous with romanticized impressions of love, hope and difference, so much so that the musicals of Rodgers and Hammerstein became 'mainstream culture for thousands of Americans who'd never been to Broadway' (Wolf 2011: 31). The unrivalled legacy of *Oklahoma!* (1943), *Carousel* (1945), *South Pacific* (1949), *The King and I* (1951) and *The Sound of Music* (1959), as arguably the duo's most popular stage works, has

therefore secured musical theatre as an idealized celebration of human existence. In addition, and more appropriately for this article, their works have associated the names ‘Rodgers’ and ‘Hammerstein’ with a formula for interrogating matters of community and ‘the clash of cultural values’ (Mast 1987: 211).

Although the presentation of crude language, violence and overt blasphemy seems far removed from the comforting musicals outlined above, *The Book of Mormon* sustains the traditional model established within such musicals in offensive gift wrap. Just as Maria von Trapp and Anna Leonowens do in *The Sound of Music* and *The King and I*, Elders Price and Cunningham uncover the commonalities of the human race to unite two opposing communities, devoid of their class, gender, race or belief system. While Maria and the Captain eradicate their conflict through their mutual love of song in *The Sound of Music*, the African villagers are ‘taught’ (as is a buzzword in several Rodgers and Hammerstein shows) that faith can be found within every society, whether poverty stricken or affluent. In turn, the opposing communities are united through sentimental values of love and hope to overcome language barriers and provide a somewhat ‘happy ending’. Although the relationship formed between the villagers and the Elders is not one of romantic love, as with Anna and the King or Maria and the Captain, the communities ‘grow to love and depend upon each other’ by accepting that all stories, whether religious or from popular culture, can be appropriated as personal mantras (Sears 2008: 159). Whilst *The Book of Mormon* does not culminate in the romantic union of *The Sound of Music*, the Ugandan villagers are inspired to celebrate their devotion to God, whatever that may mean to them, and, more importantly, to themselves. Just as Maria von Trapp unites the family through song, rather than prayer or bible teachings, religion is used within *The Book of Mormon* as a catalyst for the essential realisation of inner

goodness and the power of a loving community. The musical therefore extends an ingrained narrative trope within the musical theatre canon by depicting traditionally white Westerners who affect the outlook of several dark-skinned ‘foreigners’ with messages of love, hope and community.

That said, Stacy Wolf has noted that the central tenets of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical continue to typify the integrated ‘book’ musical, establishing a norm to be subverted rather than a tradition to be continued (2011: 202). In particular, musicals such as *Wicked* (2003) feature a somewhat realistic plot (even if set in a fantasy location), an articulate book, some form of social commentary and various non-diegetic dance numbers, in addition to a flawed, yet admirable, leading character, a romance which provides a backdrop for the narrative and a chorus that embodies the community and its values (Wolf 2011: 202). Given that this extensive list of principles characterizes much of the musical theatre canon, *The Book of Mormon* is among a series of contemporary shows that follow the Rodgers and Hammerstein model, both structurally and in terms of content. *The Book of Mormon* thus conforms to ‘the old testament of Broadway circa 1945-1965’ in that it presents flawed, yet likable, protagonists who enter cultures far different from their own intent on ‘making good’ (Rich 2011). In turn, however, the musical also belongs to a ‘new’ testament of Broadway in that it follows the Rodgers and Hammerstein model with a level of critical distance. For example, musicals such as *In the Heights* (2008) follow this model in a nostalgic fashion, just as shows like *Urinetown* (2001) comment on the overuse of such tropes within contemporary musical theatre. What differentiates *The Book of Mormon* from these types of musical, therefore, is that it also features direct and conscious references to various Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals, in addition to recycling certain narrative features or song types. *The*

Book of Mormon thus intertextually references the work of Rodgers and Hammerstein in both specific and conscious ways, in addition to the broader, conceptual following of a recognized narrative model.

In looking to analyse such uses of intertextuality more robustly, the remainder of this article will now consider how the musical features a narrative which parallels that of *The Sound of Music* (1959) and, secondly, how the sense of orientalism featured in *The King and I* (1951) is reinvented through several provocative moments within *The Book of Mormon*. Beyond simply identifying these references, however, the two central case studies will offer the opportunity to analyse these multiple forms of intertextuality, and so position *The Book of Mormon* as a notably intertextual work. More importantly, the argument attempts to expand the manner in which intertextuality is often examined within musical theatre scholarship by exploring the manner in which such references might shape, or at least influence, an audience's interpretation of *The Book of Mormon*.

HOW DO YOU SOLVE A PROBLEM LIKE MARIA?: *THE SOUND OF MUSIC* (1959)

In order to further demonstrate how these classic texts have influenced the vulgar language and overt sexuality of this contemporary musical, it is first important to consider how the works of Rodgers and Hammerstein are directly referenced within *The Book of Mormon*. Although the musical ignores any presumed requirement to be ‘politically correct’, Elder Price’s journey to self-discovery mirrors that of Maria von Trapp in *The Sound of Music*. Although this is perhaps an unexpected claim, both characters either ‘believe’ or ‘have confidence’ in their ability to do ‘good’ as they enter a chaotic community in the hope of providing ‘salvation’. In her number ‘I Have Confidence’, for instance, as written for the 1965 film adaptation of *The Sound of Music*, Maria approaches the von Trapp mansion full of ‘doubts and worries’ about ‘a captain with seven children. What’s so fearsome about that?’ (Wise 1965). In a similar fashion, Elder Price sings ‘A warlord that shoots people in the face / what’s so scary about that?’ in *The Book of Mormon* (Suskin 2012: 153). In reflecting her lyrics, melody and dramatic situation, though at a much later stage within the narrative, Price makes a direct intertextual reference to Maria von Trapp.

Price’s situation, however, is considerably more dangerous than Maria’s, since his ability to ‘believe’ requires God to physically save him, whilst Maria simply requires inner ‘confidence’. Although it is not clear whether the Captain will act violently towards Maria as she enters his family home, Price is fully aware that the General carries a gun and will shoot at will (having seen him execute a villager during the first act). Naively, then, Price believes that faith and perseverance can enable every individual to ‘follow every rainbow till you find your dream’ (as the Mother Abbess proposes in *The Sound of Music*) (Wise 1965). Instead of

converting the General, however, Price is mocked, attacked and beaten with his holy book. Whilst Maria calmly meets the Captain and his children, Price straddles a hospital bed with the Book of Mormon wedged firmly in his rectum. Although both have overcome their fears as they conclude their respective solos, Price's arrogance, unyielding faith and clear referencing of *The Sound of Music* is not enough to protect him from the violent 'natives'. He seemingly fails to convert the villagers because of his obsession with visiting Orlando and his all too literal application of the holy text. On the other hand, Maria succeeds because she refuses to apply her teachings in any literal fashion and allows the family to reconcile on their own terms. In this view, Maria's mission is more humanitarian than religious, given that she returns to the Abbey for the sake of the family, unlike Price who selfishly leaves Uganda to visit the Magic Kingdom and the dolphins of SeaWorld.

Despite the inclusion of this reference implying that Price is a strong-willed, yet ultimately flawed, protagonist, he does not help the villagers accomplish their dreams or serve as a means of survival as the musical develops. In this sense, the inclusion of this intertextual reference only heightens Price's arrogance and further distances him the types of character which tend to unite the divided communities in the work of Rodgers and Hammerstein. Instead, it is Elder Cunningham who echoes Maria characteristically, despite not referencing her in song; both characters leave somewhere they presume to be their comfort zone, though are ostracized at every turn, and arrive at a location in which they must fashion a comfort zone for themselves. Just as Maria is considered a 'problem' within the abbey, Cunningham sits outside his religious community in that he is an insecure, loud-mouthed stereotype of geekiness (complete with a *Star Wars* rucksack). Nevertheless, he finds a community in Uganda who can benefit from his quirkiness, whilst sparking a

romantic relationship with the village leader's daughter, Nabulungi.² Much like Maria, then, Cunningham is a force for good within the village, despite his unconventional approach, and is ultimately the catalyst for change and unity.

Although *The Sound of Music* is set in Austria, just as *The Book of Mormon* is set in Uganda, each musical presents a protagonist who celebrates the ingrained mythologies of the American musical. As Wolf argues, '*The Sound of Music*'s ideological work hinges on Maria's mobility in an American cultural context', often to the extent that the musical 'portrays a white American family reinventing itself through innocence and energy', with Maria acting as the source of that energy (2002: 223). In particular, both characters promote the importance of forming a community within a time of social turmoil (be that the vicious reign of an African warlord or the shadow of World War Two) to the extent that their teachings help repair an initially divided community. Whilst Cunningham does not have the lyrics of Oscar Hammerstein embedded in his rhetoric, as Price does, he uses his naive charm to fashion a community that embodies the ideologies of musical theatre as an art form. Although Maria and the Elders are not similar in age, gender or nationality, the intertextual relationship formed between *The Book of Mormon* and *The Sound of Music* runs far deeper than the recycling of narrative tropes and similarities in musical style. In this case, *The Sound of Music* acts as an intertextual prism through which to interpret the contrast between Price's attempt to 'believe' and Cunningham's triumphant reinvention of faith within a destitute African village. It may be Price who references Maria directly, but it is Cunningham who brings joy and union to the village by restoring the villagers' faith.

BY YOUR PUPILS YOU'LL BE TAUGHT: *THE KING AND I* (1951)

Having analysed the intertextual parallels between the narratives of *The Sound of Music* and *The Book of Mormon*, I wish to extend this discussion by examining how *The Book of Mormon* continually reinvents the sense of orientalism found within *The King and I*. Although the narrative parallels outlined above are certainly intertextual traces worthy of considered analysis, the following section investigates how *The Book of Mormon* follows the structural patterns of a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical at a much deeper level than the simple imitation of content. In particular, the orientalist viewpoint of *The King and I* is explored within *The Book of Mormon* as an intertextual motif which questions the underdeveloped worldview of Rodgers and Hammerstein. Given that musicals have long presented troubling depictions of race and nationhood in general, *The King and I* is a prime example of musical theatre's often colonialist attitude, particularly as most Rodgers and Hammerstein musicals present cultures 'reaching towards each other across an enormous cultural abyss' (Sears 2008: 159). As Raymond Knapp highlights, the musical theatre canon has continually featured productions which 'criticize prejudice on both sides, advocate tolerance, and remain smugly entrenched in the notion that, while "West" is better than "East", it can learn to be better' (2005: 249).

The cultural divide presented in *The King and I*, for example, dominates the narrative and is defined, in part, by gender. After all, Anna enters a culture in which being female equates to little more than slavery and, through her teaching, manages to alter the King's perception of their cultures. Unlike the orientalist impression of the West as rational, progressive and masculine, Anna represents the West as a gentle, educated, though strong-minded, female.³ That said, *The King and I* has been more regularly depicted as promoting a demeaning view of the 'Orient' from the privileged cultural position of Rodgers and

Hammerstein. As Knapp describes, in particular, for all its ‘good intentions, insights, and blithe indifference to getting things historically right, the show on the whole inevitably patronizes’ (2005: 264). As an audience, we are unscrupulously ‘invited to enjoy our superiority, to contemplate as a curiosity a faraway kingdom of harems, slavery, and barbarity, and even mourn the passing of that culture with the death of its king’ (Knapp 2005: 264). Moreover, Bruce McConachie argues that Rodgers and Hammerstein formulated the musical in such a way that ‘nature aligns with capitalism and triumphs over arrangements of power’, despite it taking ‘no obvious “stand” on American capitalism’ (2003: 157). In this sense, the musical goes to such a great length to celebrate the superiority of the West that many of the Eastern characters ‘lack an essence, an “inside”’ (McConachie 2003: 159). *The King and I* is thus a definitive illustration of orientalism as an intertextual ‘system for citing works and authors’ who have previously depicted Asia, the East, and cultures far different from their own, in a particularly narrow-minded fashion (Said 1978: 23).

Though intertextual traces from *The King and I* within *The Book of Mormon* are considerably subtler than those from *The Sound of Music*, the musical’s penultimate scene mirrors the ‘Small House of Uncle Thomas’ ballet presented in *The King and I*. Once Cunningham has converted the villagers to Mormonism through his tales of Joseph Smith and the magical ‘fuck frog’, the Mission President arrives from Utah to celebrate the Elder’s unrivalled success. To coincide with this monumental visit, the villagers burst in to present *their* story of Joseph Smith with handmade costumes, props and scenery that resemble the Mormon pageantry which embellishes the proscenium arch of the entire production. As expected, however, their performance of ‘Joseph Smith American Moses’ reflects many of Cunningham’s alterations in their presentation of raped frogs, dysentery, the ‘Great Wizard’

Moroni and the Starship Enterprise. As the number quickly escalates from quaint celebration to violent chanting ('shit go in da watah, watah go in da cup'), the Mission President is appalled and deems the Elder's mission unsuccessful (Suskin 2012: 167). In the same vein, though without expletive language or violent imagery, Tuptim and the wives of the palace perform a narrated Siamese ballet for Ambassador John Hay and Sir Edward Ramsay's visit to the palace in *The King and I*. Adapting Harriet Beecher Stowe's anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) as the 'Small House of Uncle Thomas', the ballet is similarly poorly received for its frank depictions of slavery and gender inequality. In light of this, *The Book of Mormon* and *The King and I* each draw upon racial stereotypes to 'convey the necessities of coming to terms with cultural differences of literally global dimensions' (Bush Jones 2003: 152). Despite the 'Small House' ballet ultimately confirming that Anna has successfully 'civilized' Siam, as McConachie points out, both sequences use the playfulness of storytelling to undermine racial accuracy (2003: 153). The Asian dancers of *The King and I*, for instance, portray both white oppressors and black slaves, just as the black villagers of *The Book of Mormon* portray the white founders of Mormonism. In particular, the villager Mutumbo embodies Joseph Smith in white face, a practice Knapp suggests mirrors blackface minstrelsy by favouring 'unnuanced stereotyping', and thus subverts the performance form designed to ridicule his race (Knapp 2005: 264). Mutumbo is not actively racist, however, in never mocking Smith on behalf of his race, yet his actions acknowledge that liberation and equality are traditionally the luxuries of white, Western men (Suskin 2012: 166). In this case, the performance enables the villagers to strive beyond their 'lowly' position, whilst highlighting their awareness of such stories as identifiable metaphors. 'Joseph Smith American Moses' thus mirrors the 'Small House of Uncle Thomas' in that it functions as a

‘metatheatrical summation’ of the musical’s overarching themes of civilisation, freedom and home (McConachie 2003: 155).

Unlike when Lady Thiang sings ‘Western People Funny’ in *The King and I*, claiming that ‘they think they civilize us / whenever they advise us’, the villagers of *The Book of Mormon* do not wish to oppose the dominance of the white Americans in any major way (Hammerstein 2016: 87). Instead, they wish to live like Mormons for their own comfort and survival. Although *The King and I* portrays a culture confronted by Western domination, and also modernisation, *The Book of Mormon* depicts a community trying to find its place within such an oppressive regime. In maturing the ‘chopsticks musicals’ of Rodgers and Hammerstein, as Ma Sheng-Mei describes them, *The Book of Mormon* depicts a mindful community who are unable to be brainwashed by the dreamlike qualities of Salt Lake City and the promise of a ‘latter day’. Although the musical does not give the villagers the agency they deserve, it sophisticates the work of Rodgers and Hammerstein by depicting numbers such as ‘Joseph Smith American Moses’ as playful celebrations of existence, rather than antagonistic uprisings against the West. In this case, the villagers have been taught to fashion a loving community of their own, not strive to enter or replicate a Western one. Although Nabulungi is certain that she will visit ‘Sal Tlay Ka Siti’, the adult villagers envisage Utah as an unattainable childhood dream, much like a visit to the fictional lands of Oz or Neverland. In turn, the villagers seek accessible stories of hope and determination, rather than a physical journey to a Western salvation. In this sense, *The Book of Mormon* matures the orientalist visions of the Rodgers and Hammerstein canon by providing the villagers with agency, freewill and hope. They are not presented as an unruly group who need to be tamed, meaning that, in turn, it is they who teach the Elders about cultural diversity and acceptance (to the

extent that they echo Anna's claim that 'by your pupils you'll be taught' in *The King and I* (Hammerstein 2016: 43). In this case, *The Book of Mormon* maintains 'the structure and rhythm of a classic musical' by developing the cultural view presented with such texts beyond mere orientalism and promoting contemporary ideals of social and cultural inclusion (Kennedy 2011). Although *The Book of Mormon* may draw upon the crude caricatures so regularly associated with the work of Rodgers and Hammerstein, it does so to render them ineffective and offer a contemporary alternative.

SAVING IT FOR A LATTER DAY: INTERTEXTUALITY AND AUDIENCE

In analysing several forms of intertextuality within *The Book of Mormon*, this article has explored how the production responds to and further articulates the tropes established within the 'Golden Age' of the American musical. Having compared the protagonists of *The Book of Mormon* with the iconic Maria von Trapp in *The Sound of Music*, amongst other Rodgers and Hammerstein characters, it has demonstrated how Parker, Stone and Lopez have referenced dominant perceptions of other cultures to present playful, and often provocative, alternatives. That said, *The Book of Mormon* in no way offers a more realistic or believable impression of Africa, Eastern culture or Mormonism than the classic musicals described above. Instead, the musical references a collection of popular narratives to destabilize cultural norms and further demonstrate that the celebration of community, faith and salvation runs throughout the musical theatre canon. Although the strife suffered in *The King and I* is considerably different to that witnessed by Maria von Trapp, these texts are united within the intertextual fabric of *The Book of Mormon* to be celebrated as adaptable visions of hope, self-worth and identity. Although intertextuality does not function in one specific form within the musical, *The Book of Mormon* is constructed as a bricolage of intertextual references to

entertain, poke fun and, above all things, demonstrate the importance of communal storytelling within divided communities.

What has yet to be discussed, however, is the manner in which intertextual references are always read subjectively by audiences who may or may not be aware of the specific reference point. The complex layering of references within *The Book of Mormon* only further indicates that all texts are open to interpretation and that each audience member's reading of such references will be different. What, then, is the role of intertextuality within a culture that continually recycles familiar texts? Whether in the film-to-stage adaptation of blockbuster movies or the use of popular music within jukebox musicals, the twenty-first century musical is one which reflects the culture from which it stems by incessantly referencing existing works. *The Book of Mormon* is therefore notable the manner in which it combines a series of different texts, from *Star Wars* to *The Sound of Music*, in a way that might continue to expand the demographic of musical theatre (or the audience of television shows like *South Park*). Although the expansion of audience demographics may not be the primary motivation for including intertextual references, such diverse references continue to expand the variety of audiences who attend the production. The inclusion of intertextual references within *The Book of Mormon* therefore fashions a form of performative circularity in which the production attracts a diverse audience demographic by reflecting such diversity in its selection of texts to reference. *The Book of Mormon* is not only notable for its multiplicity of intertextual references, in this sense, but for its calculated reflection of a culture which is accustomed to seeing familiar texts repackaged and repurposed for a wider audience.

WORD COUNT: 5, 449 (6, 008 with bibliography and notes)

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¹ Speaking on behalf of the Ambassador Theatre Group, Pat Westwell stated that ticket sales for the 2013 London production of *The Book of Mormon* showed 'a high rate of response from playgoers (as opposed to musical-theatre attendees) and a younger audience' that subverted the traditional demographic of most mainstream musicals. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/the-book-of-mormon-not-your-grandmas-musical-but-still-a-huge-mainstream-success-8495511.html>. Accessed 19 February 2017.

² Throughout *The Book of Mormon*, Elder Cunningham playfully refers to Nabalungi using names such as Jon Bon Jovi, Nutella, Nala, Neutrogena and Necrophilia, having presumably forgotten her name. Since the production premiered in 2011, many alternative cultural references have since been added to this list as a demonstration of Cunningham's quirkiness, but also the production's continual use of intertextual references.

³ Raymond Knapp has even suggested that the musical highlights America's post-war concerns with women's rights (2005: 261).