

THE MISSOURI AND ILLINOIS MORMONS IN ANTI-BELLUM FICTION LEONARD J. ARRINGTON & JON HAUPT



INTRODUCTION

Our understanding of the American past has been greatly enriched in recent years by studies which have made use of literary sources. Few works, for example, surpass the challenging insights and interpretations of Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land* (1950), William R. Taylor's *Cavalier and Yankee* (1961), Edmund Wilson's *Patriotic Gore* (1962), and Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* (1964).¹ Such studies have proved to be so useful that some historians now concede that a review of the contemporary fiction is a fruitful, if not an indispensable, preliminary to the search for historical truth in any period.

While literary studies have given new impetus to many sectors of American history, few scholars have sought to improve their understanding of Latter-day Saint or Mormon history through a systematic analysis of fictional works which treat the Mormons.² The recent success of historians in establishing certain facts regarding the Mormon experience in Illinois³ suggests the appropriateness of commencing an overdue exhumation of the elements

¹Other valuable literary-historical studies include: R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1955); Charles Feidelson, Jr., *Symbolism and American Literature* (Chicago, 1953); Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion* (Stanford, 1957); Fred Somkin, *Unquiet Eagle: Memory and Desire in the Idea of American Freedom, 1815-1860* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1967); and John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (New York, 1953). The writers are grateful to the Utah State University Research Council for support which made this study possible.

²Some exceptions to this generalization include: Cassie Hyde Hock, "The Mormons in Fiction" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Colorado, 1941); Kenneth B. Hunsaker, "The Twentieth Century Mormon Novel" (Ph.D. dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1968); Neal Lambert, "Saints, Sinners and Scribes: A Look at the Mormons in Fiction," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, XXXVI (Winter, 1968), 63-76; and Leonard J. Arrington and Jon Haupt, "Intolerable Zion: The Image of Mormonism in Nineteenth Century American Literature," *Western Humanities Review*, XXII (Summer, 1968), 243-260.

³Robert Bruce Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana, Ill., 1965); Klaus J. Hansen, *Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History* (East Lansing, Mich., 1967); David E. Miller, "Westward Migration of the Mormons, with Special Emphasis on the History of Nauvoo: A Report Submitted to the National Park Service" (University of Utah, 1963); and Kenneth E. Godfrey, "Sources of Mormon-Non-Mormon Conflict in Hancock County, Illinois, 1839-1844" (Ph.D. dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1967).

of fact and fancy in the literature relating to this phase of the Mormon story. It is almost a certitude that the images of the Latter-day Saints presented in ante-bellum novels, whether accurate or not, influenced national policies which were applied to the Mormons, and thus these images were important factors in the history of both the Mormons and the nation.

The limited communications of the nineteenth century, along with the relative isolation of Mormon settlements, decreed that the formulation of the Mormon image, which was to be accepted by many Americans and Europeans, was left to imaginative writers rather than to objective reporters. Because the narratives of these writers were often permeated with elements of make-believe, and because anti-Mormon propaganda frequently borrowed from fiction, it is important to look at imaginative literature in its most stereotyped form in order to isolate the contemporary image of the Mormons. Prose fiction — even when poorly written — reveals feelings and thought processes which are often left unrecorded in formal or conventional accounts.

To be sure, a journey over these century-old literary landscapes leaves the historian with a feeling that he is visiting a nightmare world of unreality. It seems clear that the Mormons were linked, in America and Europe, to larger images which were not of their own making. From the beginning, authors projected onto the hapless Saints the great mosaic of human hopes and terrors which occupied mid-nineteenth-century minds. Like a mirror, the Latter-day Saints of fiction reflected these preoccupations.

THREE ANTE-BELLUM NOVELS

Before the Civil War, at least seven novels were published which included scenes depicting the Mormons in Missouri and Illinois.⁴

The first use of Mormon characters in a romance is found in *Monsieur Violet: His Travels and Adventures Among the Snake Indians and Wild Tribes of the Great Western Prairies* — a rambling story published in 1843 by Captain Frederick Marryat (1792–1848).⁵ Marryat was a British naval captain with many decorations for distinguished and valiant service. He relinquished his commission in 1830 for a literary career. In the next eighteen years, Marryat turned out sixteen novels, the most famous of which was *Mr. Midshipman Easy* (1836). This exciting and realistic narrative of naval adventure brought him instant fame. In 1837–1838, Marryat visited the United States and later published a three-volume diary of his observations and experiences.⁶ A rabid Tory, Marryat went to some length to place the Ameri-

⁴Two European novels are not reviewed here: Amalie (Weise) Schoppe, *Der Prophet: Historischer Roman aus der Neuzeit Nord-Amerikas* (3 vols., Jena, 1846); and Paul Duplessis, *Les Mormons* (Paris, 1858, 1859; New York, 1859, 1860).

⁵Later published in London in 1849 under the title *The Travels and Adventures of Monsieur Violet in California, Sonora, and Western Texas*.

⁶*A Diary in America*, 3 vols. (London, 1839). Although he made several lengthy trips to St. Louis when the Mormons were in Far West, Missouri, Marryat does not mention meeting any Latter-day Saints. Indeed, Marryat does not mention the Mormons at all in his lengthy *Diary*, except in a "Table of Religious Denominations." One supposes that if Marryat had actually heard the anecdotes he relates in *Monsieur Violet*, he would have recorded them in his travel diary.

can democracy in a bad light. His fictional anecdotes about the Mormons in *Monsieur Violet* must be interpreted in this context.

Monsieur Violet is a story of the exploits of a young Frenchman among the Indians of the Great Plains and Southwest. The work is said to have been based on the actual experiences of a Monsieur Lasalles, who visited Marryat in England and recounted to him his adventures. The portion of the novel which deals with the Mormons is an episode in which Violet, as the representative of an Indian chief, seeks to interest Joseph Smith in uniting with the Indians to extend the Mormon empire.⁷ Although the episode comprises about fifteen percent of the total volume, it is not well integrated and appears to have been an afterthought. Comparison shows the Mormon section of Marryat's book to be almost identical to sections in John C. Bennett's *History of the Saints* (New York, 1842).⁸

The first English language romance in which the Mormons are central to the plot is a fifty-three page *novella* by Professor John Russell of Bluffdale, Illinois.⁹ *The Mormoness: or, the Trials of Mary Maverick* deals with the causes and consequences of the Haun's Mill Massacre. Internal evidence indicates that Russell probably observed much of what he describes.

The central characters are James and Mary Maverick, a respected and industrious couple from Greene County, Illinois. When James and Mary are converted to Mormonism and join the Saints in Caldwell County, Missouri, they are caught in the bitter persecution of 1836. James is killed on the doorstep of his home by a mob bent on exterminating the Mormons. When Mary pleads for the life of her son, the mob responds by shooting the child, spattering his blood over the mother's dress. Mary escapes, along with other Saints, to Illinois where she becomes a nurse to a nearby Shawnee Indian tribe. There she encounters a white man who has been critically wounded by the Indians. She recognizes him as the person who shot her child and, despite her revulsion, prays for strength to nurse the murderer back to health.

⁷It may be that Marryat or Lasalles had knowledge of the occasional visits of Indians to Nauvoo. Under date of August 12, 1841, Joseph Smith wrote in his journal: "A considerable number of the Sac and Fox Indians have been for several days encamped in the neighborhood of Montrose. The ferryman brought over a great number on the ferryboat and two flat boats for the purpose of visiting me. . . . [I] met Keokuk, Kis-ku-kosh, Appenoose, and about one hundred chiefs and braves of those tribes, with their families. . . . I advised them to cease killing each other and warring with other tribes; also to keep peace with the whites. . . ." Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* . . . , 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, 1902-1912), IV, 401-402.

⁸Much of Bennett's volume is, in turn, largely a reprint of *Mormonism Portrayed*, a pamphlet published in 1841 by William Harris and actually written, according to Dale Morgan, by Thomas Sharp, editor of the *Warsaw Signal*. Sharp was one of the men tried for the murder of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. Bennett also reprints a number of affidavits from Eber D. Howe's *Mormonism Unveiled* (Painesville, Ohio, 1834).

⁹(Alton, Illinois, 1853). Born in Vermont in 1793, Russell received a classical education at Vermont's Middlebury College, and migrated to Greene County, Illinois, in 1828. There he became a writer and educator of considerable local distinction and edited the first Greene County newspaper, *The Backwoodsman*. He died at Bluffdale in 1863. See John Reynolds, "An Author at His Residence — Prof. John Russell, of Bluff Dale," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, IV (1911-1912), 172-177; also *Ibid.*, XIII (1920-1921), 221.

As he recovers, the man falls in love with Mary and asks her to marry him. Mary's brother tells him why she cannot accept his proposal. The murderer comes to a realization of the enormity of his sin and is filled with such anguish that he goes insane. At the same time, the good widow, strength and will exhausted, expires. Her last words are that we must be tolerant, we must be forgiving, and we must love our enemies — including the deluded Mormons, the superstitious Catholics, and the uncivilized Indians.

The Mormoness is among the few nineteenth-century novels which declare that Mormonism is a fraud, yet proceed to demonstrate that the use of physical force against the sect is neither effective nor Christian. A Christian must respond to such fanaticisms, the author believes, with love.

A third fictional work, *The California Crusoe; or, The Lost Treasure Found: A Tale of Mormonism*,¹⁰ deals with an English Convert to Mormonism. This tale was probably written by an Anglican clergyman, and while it declares itself to be a "true" narrative,¹¹ a glance will persuade today's reader that almost all of its 154 pages are fictitious.

Crusoe tells the story of Robert Richards, who embarks with two hundred Saints for Nauvoo. Enroute, Richards and his family observe a steamboat race on the Mississippi River. One of the boats explodes, killing several people.¹² Richards is irritated over this "typical" American recklessness, this "wanton spirit of emulation." He is further disgusted when he sees "slaves working in the plantations and the handsome residences in which the proprietors . . . [enjoy] all the elegancies of life" (35, 52). On his arrival at Nauvoo, Richards purchases a farm from Joseph Smith, the hard-drinking, "profitable prophet" (84). Finally concluding that Mormonism, as he long suspected, is a giant Yankee swindle, Richards demands his money back. Smith predictably squelches him by saying, "What a fuss you Englishmen always make about your money" (87). Financially trapped, Richards follows the Saints to Utah. He eventually manages to escape from Utah's "material god," accidentally strikes it rich in California, and ultimately settles down — once more in the comfortable fold of the English Church — in a California town with "an honest English name" (139, 154).

The self-evident purpose of *Crusoe* is to warn English parishioners of the evils and dangers waiting for them if they convert to Mormonism and journey across the sea. The book frequently alludes as well to the evils of the economic aristocracy and the Catholic Church, but its author attacks Mormonism with a dozen anecdotes of deception and depravity.

¹⁰[Robert Richards, *pseud.*] (London and New York, 1854).

¹¹Many novels claimed a factual origin to gain respectability, since fiction as fiction was widely considered immoral and a waste of time. See Herbert Ross Brown, *The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860* (Durham, N.C., 1940), pp. 9-10.

¹²Obviously, a reference to the *Saluda* disaster. A secondary theme of *Crusoe* and similar volumes is the Mormon proneness to accidents and bad fortune. This theme was probably intended to counteract the Mormon claim that, as God's Chosen People, they were especially blessed.

THREE NOVELS BY WOMEN

In 1855-1856 a trio of novels was published which dealt with the "evils" of polygamy. All were written by American women. The spectacular success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852 and the public announcement of plural marriage the same year probably encouraged women to expose this "twin evil of barbarism."¹³ The three works were the first of more than thirty anti-polygamy novels published in the last half of the nineteenth century. Each of the three has the Mormons practicing polygamy in Missouri and Nauvoo, well in advance of the murder of Joseph Smith.

The first of these novels to appear was *The Prophets; or, Mormonism Unveiled* which is thought to have been written by Orvilla S. Belisle.¹⁴ Miss Belisle seeks verisimilitude with six introductory chapters of "history," but, like her earlier anti-Catholic novel, her anti-Mormon novel is filled with tales of dark doings and immorality.

Margaret, the heroine, is a Massachusetts lass "whose ancestors had fled from the oppression of the old world in the 'Mayflower,' and [had] borne with [them] all the love of virtue which caused [them] to forsake a fatherland, for a wilderness haunted by beasts of prey, and a savage race. . ." (98). She marries Arthur Guilford, a Yankee lad whose impulsiveness and great ambition compel him to leave Margaret's beloved New England and take his bride to "Kirkland," Ohio. There he promptly converts to Mormonism. As a "true child of civilization," however, Margaret remains aloof and scorns Joseph Smith as an imposter. The Prophet annoys her with many vulgar "propositions," and Margaret always rebuffs him. Miss Belisle reveals her major theme — Mormonism as a threat to social order and the aristocratic classes — when she has the snubbed Prophet grumble aloud that the "Guilfords are aristocrats, haughty and domineering, like all of their class. . . . These aristocrats have ruled the world long enough, trampling upon us, and it is our turn now to tread upon them; for by the sacredness of my mission there shall be a levelling down . . ." (115). Arthur loses his money when the Kirkland bank fails (the novel emphasizes the Mormons' supposed materialism).¹⁵ The poor New England couple have no choice but to join the Mormon "adventurers" as they move to Missouri.

¹³In a "counterblast of moral reprobation," many Southern writers, infuriated over Mrs. Stowe's novel, attacked the North for its crass, ruthless industrialism, and especially for its proclivity for "isms." Perhaps the most popular of these works was George Fitzhugh's *Cannibals All! Or, Slaves Without Masters* (Richmond, 1857). Fitzhugh made an interesting case for Mormonism as perhaps the worst "ism" in an "anarchistic" North: "In the name of polygamy, it has practically removed all restraints to the intercourse of sexes, and broken up the Family. It promises, too, a qualified community of property and a fraternal association of labor. It beats up monthly thousands of recruits from free society in Europe and America, but makes not one convert in the slaveholding South. Slavery is satisfied and conservative" (p. 313, our italics).

¹⁴(Philadelphia, 1855); also published under the title *Mormonism Unveiled: or a History of Mormonism From its Rise to the Present Time* (London, 1855).

¹⁵One historian feels that there have been two primary ways of describing the American character: "One depicts the American primarily as an individualist and an idealist, while the other makes him out as a conformist and a materialist." David M. Potter, "The Quest

The scene then shifts to England where a debauched Mormon missionary named Richards has been preaching unrest and riot among the working classes of Manchester. He causes a walkout, and one of the ruined merchants, Oliver Hatfield, preferring not to face "poverty and disgrace" at home, sets sail with his wife and daughters for the "Land of Promise" at Nauvoo. Richards and his cohorts are also on board, allowing Miss Belisle to demonstrate the outcome of mixing upper and lower classes — Richards seduces Maud, one of Hatfield's two daughters, and they are "tacitly betrothed" (158).

Arriving at Zion (presumably Missouri), Richards embraces his "first" wife, Maria. Finally aware and utterly enraged at this evidence of duplicity, Papa Hatfield canes the missionary-seducer and instantly dies of apoplexy for his trouble. Undismayed, Richards makes overtures to Maud's little sister Rose, and soon Rose is with child. Meanwhile, Maud is stabbed to death in her sleep by Richards' first wife. Miss Belisle writes, "There was a gurgling groan and stifled sob, the round white arms were frantically tossed in the air, as the murderess bounded away, and the warm life blood spout[ed] in jets" (213).

The Saints are soon expelled from Zion and flee to Clay County, Missouri, and then to Illinois. There "midnight orgies" commence again, and the "fair luxuriant region" of Nauvoo is turned into a "filthy pool" (257). Women are kidnapped from surrounding communities to staff Mormon "harems." Miss Belisle describes the plight of Lizzie Monroe, who had recently been kidnapped: "In an upper room of Young's harem, sat a young girl, in an attitude of despair. She was scarcely eighteen years of age, of full round form, and complexion that rivalled the peach when ripened by the southern sun, lips of cherry, and eyes liquid and blue as the heart of a spring violet. Now her long, shining hair was in disorder, her dark lashes dropped over the liquid orbs, and her rounded arms hung listlessly by her side, as the fair young head sunk in despair upon her bosom. Alas! how often she had tried her feeble strength against the bars of the window and bolts of the door" (277). An ugly man in his late fifties, presumably Brigham Young, entered the room, grabbed the girl's wrists and growled that he loved her. Lizzie "shrank away as if a serpent held her hands in its folds and was looking down on its victim." When Brigham scooped the "spring violet" into his husky arms, she "shrieked wildly" (281). The rest of the scene is charitably left to the reader's imagination.¹⁶

for the National Character," in John Higham, ed., *The Reconstruction of American History* (New York, 1962), pp. 198-199. It is interesting to trace Mormons as they are characterized in fiction. In nineteenth-century literature, Mormons appear most often as ungodly materialists; they appear less often as duped conformists or idealists; they — or their leaders — appear only occasionally as individualists. For additional notions about the Mormons and the American character, see Constance Rourke, *American Humor: A Study of the National Character* (New York, 1931).

¹⁶Steven Marcus, in *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England* (London, 1966), suggests that below the surface of Victorian middle-class respectability was a volcano of sexual repression. Because they dealt with the problem of rooting out evil, "anti-Mormon" novels offered a convenient and acceptable vehicle for purveying erotica.

Later, a friend finds Lizzie and rescues her before the "Brothers of Gideon" can catch them. Soon all self-respecting persons around Nauvoo "joined in the cry for the extermination of [this] band of parasites who lived and preyed, ghoul-like, on their fellows" (323). Joseph Smith is murdered by "Indians" but non-Mormons know there could never "be security for life or property within the state, until it was freed from the pestilential presence of those worse than Egyptian locusts" (335). Miss Belisle's Mormons, now associated "with guilt in every form" (241), are expelled from Illinois.

The author's message is clear. Keep the wily Jacobin Mormons out of England. Don't believe the promise of the "promised land." Leaving Old or New England can only mean financial ruin, broken families, humiliation, and death!

The second of the anti-polygamist novels was *Female Life Among the Mormons: A Narrative of Many Years' Personal Experience, by the Wife of a Mormon Elder, Recently from Utah*.¹⁷ The identity of the author, purportedly a Mrs. Maria Ward, is unknown, although some have speculated that it was Mrs. B. G. Ferris, author of *The Mormons At Home* (1856) and wife of the Secretary of Utah Territory, 1852-53. *Female Life Among the Mormons* quickly sold forty thousand copies, and many thousands of additional copies were printed in succeeding years under a variety of titles. Translated into French, Dutch, Swedish, and Danish, the novel was probably the most widely distributed book about the Mormons in the nineteenth century. The book contains little accurate information about the Mormons or their religion. It does contain countless scenes of torture and sadism, and even suggestions of lesbianism. The "moral lesson" is that Mormonism thrives on "weak" women who "abandon comfortable homes and situations, in order to follow some mad fanatic" (76). Violent death is guaranteed for any lady who considers such a move.

The third anti-polygamist novel published in the mid-1850's was Metta Victoria Fuller's *Mormon Wives: A Narrative of Facts Stranger Than Fiction*.¹⁸ Miss Fuller, who later married Orville Victor, editor of "Beadle's Dime Novels," wrote at least a dozen sensational women's novels. Miss Fuller's snobbish New England heroine considers the Mormons "ignorant," "prejudiced," and obviously "degraded" (124, 226). The sons and daughters of Puritanism, she writes, have demonstrated their abhorrence of slavery and intemperance — evils enough! — but find Mormon polygamy even "more loathesome and poisonous to social and political purity." In the end, Mormons are completely animalized.

PERCY ST. JOHN'S TEMPLE

Our final ante-bellum novel, with descriptions of Mormons in New York, Missouri and Nauvoo, is Percy Bolingbrook St. John's *Jessie, the Mormon*

¹⁷(New York, 1855, 1856, 1857, 1858, 1860; London, 1855). Republished as *Maria Ward's Disclosures: Female Life Among the Mormons . . .* (New York, 1858).

¹⁸(New York, 1856, 1858). Republished as *Lives of Female Mormons* (Philadelphia, 1859, 1860; New York, 1860).

Daughter.¹⁹ The son of James Augustus St. John, a celebrated author and traveller, Percy accompanied his father on some of his travels and began writing boy's adventure stories when he was quite young.

Appearing first as a anonymous serial in the London *Herald* and later as a three-volume novel (1861), *Jessie* is an ethnocentric, hate-filled work unlike anything else that St. John wrote. It cries out for the liquidation of the Mormons, all but praises the murderers of Joseph Smith, and is packed with prurient episodes. The Mormons are wicked, blasphemous, lustful, cunning, and evil. Their primary aim is to "steal away the girls and women of England to fill their harems" (Preface). Polygamy is "but another name for indiscriminate prostitution" (10). Mormonism is "a barbarous and bigoted false religion, . . . one of the grossest impostures and most transparent shams" which ever deluded human credulity (480). St. John's Mormons consume barrels of wine and conduct naked "love feasts" (15).

St. John's fantasy opens in a forest in upper New York State, at the residence-fort of Captain Simon Reardon and his sixteen-year-old daughter, Emma. Interested in the antiquities of the region, the Captain one day chances on some brass plates covered with hieroglyphics. Sometime later, a young bookworm named Solomon Spaulding passes through the region in search of information about the ancient history of the Indians. He visits the Captain, examines the brass plates, and in a burst of mental excitement composes an exotic romance which describes the advent of the Indians in America.

After several weeks at the fort, Solomon falls ill and Emma ventures out for medicine. On her way back, she is captured by Indians. Four teenagers, including Joseph and Hiram Smith, observe the capture, track the Indians, and creep up on them at night. They fire a volley into the camp, free the girl, and accompany her back to the fort. Young Joseph — the "serpent" in "this new Garden of Eden" (34) — is described as ignorant and rawboned, yet ambitious and devilishly cunning. He "lusted with all his soul for power, wealth, and women" (31–32). Joseph seduces Emma and St. John says, "Such was the first of many amorous exploits of the man who later became General-Prophet-Inventor-High Priest. He had not, however, yet discovered a wholesale system of seduction, nor had he invented his female cattle market" (36). At the earliest opportunity, Joseph elopes with Emma — and takes along the Spaulding manuscript.

Off in the wilderness, Emma teaches Joseph to read. The prophet-to-be commits the Spaulding manuscript to memory. One day, while reciting memorized passages in the woods, Joseph encounters "Simon" Rigdon, a printer, engraver, and minister of the gospel. It turns out that Rigdon has also seen a copy of Spaulding's work. Joseph convinces Rigdon that they should start a new religion and thereby possess wealth and power. Together they engrave plates of gold and bury them in the "Hill Cumoro." At the same time Joseph secretly cavorts with a local girl who dresses in white; she is the

¹⁹(3 vols., London, 1861). We are grateful to Guy Potter who read this novel in the British Museum and provided us with extensive notes.

"angel" who appears to Joseph. Joseph pacifies Emma, who discovers the affair, by getting his rifle and shooting the "angel" (72-73).

Countless scenes follow which illustrate the cunning and perversion of Mormon leaders — scenes of elders deserting their wives and seducing young female converts and scenes of heavy drunkenness and prostitution.

The third volume briefly turns to what purports to be history. St. John then reverts to pure fiction as he relates the story of a young English girl, Jessie, whom the elders attempt to rape. Later, when Jessie accompanies a group of Mormons to Missouri, she watches the men systematically steal chickens, pigs, cows, and wives and daughters of gentile farmers along the way. According to St. John, wife-stealing is the real source of the Mormons trouble. Taking the law into your own hands is usually not justified, he writes, "But as there are certain noxious vermin who are only to be rooted out by poison, . . . the apostles of prostitution and adultery [must] be treated in a different way from anything else. In [Britain] we would give them over to a jury of indignant English matrons . . ." (386).

Driven out of Missouri, the Mormons make their way to Nauvoo. St. John describes several cruel seductions and the marriage of an elder to his step-daughter. Nauvoo soon dissolves into gross iniquity. According to St. John, the great temple is a torture chamber, a "fearful museum of many instruments" (359). When the temple is completed, girls are herded inside, bound with chains, and whipped with thongs.

Nauvoo might have been a paradise, St. John concludes, but instead it is an intriguing example of the fate of a virgin wilderness when the ignorant rabble tramples over it. It is better to reside in England where life's details are managed by people of character.

MORMONISM AS A SYMBOL

The seven novels discussed here were written within fifteen years of the Mormon Nauvoo period. While none can qualify as great literature, they demonstrate a rather considerable interest in the Mormons and their "Kingdom on the Mississippi." Anti-Mormonism has often been attributed to nativist tendencies,²⁰ but to assign such intense interest and hostility to a single cause holds obvious dangers. Only a broader explanation can account for these phantasmagoric works and their widespread popularity.

To begin with, as has already been posited, the imaginative works discussed here reveal more about the writers and their own intellectual and cultural environment than they do about the Mormon experience. The concern for certain social issues such as slavery and the changing role of women, the fear of traditional temptations, and the fear of a dark yet alluring Amer-

²⁰David Brion Davis, "Some Themes of Counter-Subversion: An Analysis of Anti-Catholic, Anti-Masonic and Anti-Mormon Literature," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLVII (September, 1960), 205-224. No doubt anti-Mormonism was in large part nativist, but Davis overlooks the international aspects of anti-Mormonism. Virtually all of Davis' anti-Mormon material is taken from sources dated after 1856. See also: Mark W. Cannon, "The Crusades Against the Masons, Catholics, and Mormons: Separate Waves of a Common Current," *Brigham Young University Studies*, III (Winter, 1961), 23-40.

ican wilderness — all are patently interwoven through these novels. Literature thumped and kneaded the Mormons into a master symbol of all that was wrong with America. Readers in Britain as well as in America apparently found a scapegoat upon which they might displace their social and moral uneasiness.

Certain criticisms were first written by ministers, businessmen, politicians, apostates, and others who had personal reasons for opposing the Mormons and the extension of their Kingdom. The scare techniques used by these individuals to discourage conversion and immigration included exaggeration of the supposed evils of Mormonism. However, the sheer hatred in anti-Mormon works betrays an intellectual and emotional revulsion that requires examination. We hypothesize four patterns of criticism in this literature.

THE TRANSPARENT FRAUD

Almost all published commentaries characterized the Mormon religion as a fraud and a sham — “a Yankee speculation.” Joseph and his associates were hypocrites, and the whole system was humbug from inception. This portrayal was given impetus by the absence of a professional Mormon clergy and the consequent involvement of spiritual leaders in temporal affairs. In contemporary literature, the mule-driving elder was Sunday’s picture of sobriety and propriety, but he was also Monday’s swearing animal-beater. A businessman-bishop was brimming with piety in church, but was a fierce capitalist-competitor during the week. The absence of clear dichotomies between religion and politics, between religion and business, and between religion and social morality forced a daily confrontation of religion with life. In their attempts to work out a new Christian solution to problems of the workaday world, Mormon leaders were easily interpreted as being insincere.

In 1840 a New York convert to Mormonism journeyed to Nauvoo to see the Prophet Joseph. The New Yorker apparently expected to see a solemn, long-faced, white-robed divine. Instead, he saw an affable young man who flitted easily from dictating revelations in a serious moment to wrestling with his apostles, joking with neighbors, and romping with his children in a playful moment.²¹ It seemed but a short step from playing with children to playing a joke on adults. Joseph did not fit the image of a prophet; the convert from New York apostatized.

THE “IGNORANT RABBLE”

Much of the literature relating to the Mormons was apparently intended for upper-class readers. Who among people of substance could believe that the Almighty would restore His Church through an uneducated backwoods

²¹“History of George A. Smith,” May 25, 1833, “George A. Smith Name File,” Church Historian’s Library and Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah. See also, the “half jest, half earnest,” comment about Joseph Smith in Henry Adams, ed., “Charles Francis Adams Visits the Mormons in 1844,” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, LXVIII (October, 1844–May, 1847) (Boston, 1952), p. 286.

farm boy? What intellectual could seriously consider these farmers and mechanics? The Saints were almost universally described as ignorant, loud, uncouth, and lazy. Their conversation was ungrammatical. Conversion was by emotional appeal and by sham miracles, such as curing rheumatism or a toothache.²² In short, Mormonism could appeal only to the lower-class rabble who loved blasphemous hocus-pocus and the unrestrained, debauched life of the Western frontier. Persons of gentility would never willingly associate with such people, and if Mormons sought to mingle with better classes they clearly violated good taste.²³ Emphasizing the gap between their own civilization and the rude culture of the Saints, writers in both Old and New England seemed to shout, "Look! This is what will happen if you leave home and go West where the Mormons and other riff-raff live in sin!" Of the Mormons one Englishman wrote, "Behold, oh Americans, the blot that has made you a by-word to the citizens of the old world."²⁴ An American writer retorted, "... we wish *English Mormons* and *paupers* to stay where they are. We have here 'darkness' enough without an additional cloud flung over us from the old world."²⁵

The fact that the Saints had persons of refinement in their midst was explained by the presence of Gestapo groups like the Brothers of Gideon, the Daughters of Zion or the Danites, which effectively prevented such cultured persons from escaping. Many of the episodes in these novels revolve around thrilling escapes to freedom, enlightenment, and stability.

When Mormonism was rejected out of hand by the free-thinking Franklinesque intellectuals of the 1830's and 1840's, criticism fell to the purists, the crusaders, and the partisan ministers whose dissection of Mormonism was emotional rather than intellectual. From sneers and snobbish contempt, the attacks on Mormonism evolved into mindless, fire-breathing onslaughts by frontier religions.

THE FRONTIER REVIVAL

Many nineteenth-century writers believed that the movement to the frontier occasioned a reversion to the primitive, which sometimes meant savagery. The Church originated in western New York State, which was regarded as the frontier by New Englanders, and continued to move westward — to Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, Iowa, and finally Utah. Undoubtedly the Mormons were associated in the minds of Eastern writers with the excesses of the frontier. New Englanders, writing about Mormons they had

²²A smugness or reverse snobbishness on the part of the Saints might have contributed to the East's insistence that most Mormons were disgustingly lower class. In anti-Mormon novels a lady never becomes a Mormon. As one upper-class character remarked, "Think of the misery to a woman of any refinement!" Theodore Winthrop, *John Brent* (New York, 1861), p. 85.

²³"Mormonism and the Mormons," *Methodist Quarterly Review*, XXV (January, 1843), 114.

²⁴Belisle, *The Prophets*, p. 6.

²⁵*Methodist Quarterly Review*, XXV (January, 1843), 126-127.

never seen, described them in terms of revivalism, millenarianism and fanaticism.

Because they lived on the frontier, the Mormons were stereotyped as inveterate smokers, drunkards, and sexual perverts. Female authors gave Mormon men all the characteristics — callousness, sadism, and unbridled lust — which they thought typified the undomesticated male.

THE DEPRAVED BEAST

Perhaps the single most common theme in early anti-Mormon literature was Mormon depravity. Physically, the Saints were pictured as snakes or as ugly toad-like creatures; mentally, most were portrayed as ignorant; spiritually, they were described as the essence of evil.

Psychologists have studied behavioral patterns which involve persistent distortions of reality.²⁶ One of these patterns involves the tendency to hate people whom we feel we have wronged, and to regard those we hate as depraved. John Greenleaf Whittier anticipated behavioral science in explaining the expulsion of the Mormons from Missouri in 1838. He wrote, "The reports circulated against them [the Latter-day Saints] by their unprincipled enemies in the west are in the main destitute of foundation. I place no dependence upon charges made against them by the ruffian mob of the Mississippi valley, and the reckless slave-drivers, who, at the point of the bayonet and bowie-knife, expelled them from Missouri, and signalized their Christian crusade against unbelievers by murdering old men, and violating their innocent wives and daughters. *It is natural that the wrong-doers should hate those whom they have so foully injured.*"²⁷ By accusing the Mormons of robbery, murder, and lust, the Missouri and Illinois ruffians were able to exercise their own propensities in these directions toward the Mormons.²⁸

Assuming that many had guilty consciences for having wronged the Mormons, and also assuming the psychological need to project animality onto the Mormons, it can be seen how the stories of Mormon cruelty and depravity became a significant part of the Mormon myth. Almost everyone who headed west — trappers, guides, travellers, and settlers — passed through Missouri. Tales of the wicked Saints spread from the outfitting posts and river-port towns to nearly all settlements of the West. Moreover, the nation as a whole appears to have been sufficiently frustrated in preserving its moral code that there existed an emotional need to project immorality on the Mormons and certain other groups, to think of them as alien out-groups deserving of national aggression.²⁹

²⁶We have profited from reading John Dollard, Neal E. Miller, *et al.*, *Frustration and Aggression* (New Haven, 1939).

²⁷John G. Whittier, "A Mormon Conventicle," *Littell's Living Age*, XV (December 4, 1847), 461. Our italics.

²⁸Vardis Fisher's novel, *Children of God: An American Epic* (New York, 1939), at times reveals a tacit knowledge of these psychological possibilities.

²⁹Davis, "Themes of Counter-Subversion," pp. 214, 216, 219.

CONCLUSION

In May, 1839, George Peck, the editor of the *Methodist Quarterly Review*, travelled up the Mississippi, and observed the Mormons "flying for life across the river" from Missouri into Illinois: "We saw [he wrote a few years later] a motley group on the bank of the river, who as we could judge, had no covering for their heads but covered wagons and some small tents. Little did we then suppose that this was an embryo city, which would develop itself so rapidly as that in three years from that time it would become the glory of the "Latter-day Saints," and the *terror* of the great west."³⁰

To a modern economist the building of Nauvoo was a remarkable demonstration of Americans in the process of achieving a "take-off into self-sustained growth."³¹ A few years after this achievement Henry David Thoreau looked at a panorama of the Mississippi. In his imagination he saw "the steamboats wooding up, counted the rising cities, gazed on the fresh ruins of Nauvoo. . . . I saw that this was a Rhine stream of a different kind; that . . . the famous bridges were yet to be thrown over the river; and I felt that this was the heroic age itself . . . , for the hero is commonly the simplest and obscurest men"³² The emergence of Nauvoo, Phoenix-like, out of a swamp on the edge of the Mississippi, offered an unparalleled opportunity for America's literary minds to study American people at work. As a symbol of America's heroic age, the Nauvoo story might have included commentary on Mormon farmers and Mormon craftsmen who built sturdy homes and a magnificent temple. Literary artists might have recorded Mormon songs, prayers, and dances — and their ideals, their fears, their dreams of the future. Writers might have described the way in which immigrant-converts became "Americans," and written of the contributions which they made to the pluralistic culture of the Mississippi frontier.

These opportunities were passed by. The Mormons were viewed as aliens — an excrescence on an organic body politic. Ignored by literary masters, Nauvoo Mormons and their high tragedy fell into the hands of hack writers who denied them a grandeur they rightfully deserved.³³

The early Mormons saw their image — and ideal — of themselves as restorers of true Christianity replaced by an image of crude imposture and perversion. The Mormons were not "Saints" at all, but easily-recognized Yankee hypocrites who had donned the mask of religion for selfish ends — in order to exploit for themselves alone the beautiful land of plenty. The Saints' Kingdom, once fixed within or linked to larger images, could only

³⁰"Mormonism and the Mormons," *Methodist Quarterly Review*, XXV (January, 1843), 114n. Italics in original.

³¹W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), esp. pp. 36-58.

³²Matthieson, *American Renaissance*, pp. 632-633.

³³How the Mormons would have fit into "great literature" will always, of course, be in the realm of speculation. What, for instance, did D. H. Lawrence mean when he said, in discussing Nathaniel Hawthorne, "It is probable that the Mormons are the forerunners of the coming real America"? *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York, 1923, 1961), p. 94.

be a Victorian nightmare of broken families and broken hearts. Not possessing, or in some cases not using, the ability to rationally analyze Mormon realities, ante-bellum writers consigned Mormonism to a world of myth and fantasy. The Mormon phenomenon was supposedly incompatible with commonly accepted ideals, something to be rejected and exterminated. As a result some of the most creative ideas and accomplishments of Jacksonian America were eventually crushed.

With the historical understanding of today, the profession must acknowledge all the aspects of Mormon Nauvoo and accord it greater honor than ante-bellum writers bestowed when the City of Joseph was still shining in the wilderness.