

Magic and the Supernatural in Utah Folklore

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NO BRANCH OF STUDY, academic or popular, penetrates as deeply into man's intuitive life or mirrors his contemplative self as clearly as folklore. Folklore lays bare man's myriad fears and anxieties, while at the same time in full counterpoint it reveals his whimsy, his visions, and his flights of fancy that ennoble and exalt. It is for these reasons, and particularly because of its heavy component of magic and the supernatural, that psychologists from Wundt and Freud to Jung and his modern disciples have found in folklore a veritable seed-bed for their work. The materials for a study of popular culture in Utah are gradually being assembled. As one can expect, they bear the impress of the common American culture of which they were born, yet many of these products of the popular mind exhibit features of their Rocky Mountain habitat and of their Mormon religious legacy as well.

Utah folklore, like Joseph's coat of many colors, contains patterns and strands from divers sources, foreign as well as domestic. These sturdy fibers were either woven into the basic fabric of folklore during the Utah period, or were cultural importations so basic and widespread as to have helped shape Mormon folklore from the beginning. Thus before the midnineteenth century the early fabric of Mormon folklore included the hardy homespun cultural goods of New England and New York strongly webbed with the basic English and Dutch folklore of the people who had colonized these states. The movement of the Mormons across the gateway states of Pennsylvania and Ohio brought ethnic reinforcement, principally German and Pennsylvania Dutch. The first infiltration of rich southern folklore into these states had come after

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1774 with Scottish and English settlers from the coastal plain and piedmont areas of Eastern Appalachia moving westward through the Cumberland Gap by way of the Great Wilderness Road through the mountains. Thus by the 1840s when the Mormon migration had reached Iowa and the western staging ground of Missouri, the folklore from the northeast had been qualified by southern folklore moving westward to these outposts over three or four decades.¹ By this time, French folklore had also reached these pivotal states by slow penetration across the northern woods from the Saint Lawrence River basin and, following a more direct route, northward from the lower Mississippi. In fact, French river towns and settlements had been established in Illinois, Missouri, and Iowa decades before the Mormons arrived. Finally, the Mormon Battalion's brief incursion into Mexico at the very time the Mormons were engaged in their epochal migration to their new homeland resulted in the earliest borrowings, slight and sporadic though they were, of Hispanic and Latin-American folklore into Mormon repertoires.²

Before delving into specific examples, some preliminary observations should be made regarding the current influence of folk belief and superstition in Utah. In modern society's welter of conflicting ideas on religion, politics, education, and the practical matters of daily life, it is difficult to find even neighbors up and down the same street who will agree on much of anything at all. Certainly, in this time of waning religious conviction, and particularly in the face of sweeping scientific advances, it is unlikely that any moral suasion or folk wisdom would, as it did in the past, keep a woman from baking at the time of a new moon — if indeed she bakes at all anymore — simply because it is said to be a bad omen.³ Nor could she be prevented from canning and preserving food, (Cannon, no. 5823) or making pickles or sauerkraut during her menses, (Cannon, no. 5830; cf. no. 5831) however often she may have heard these old taboos. Similarly, it would be surprising to learn that modern ranchers wean, castrate, brand, and butcher their stock according to the phases of the moon (Cannon, nos. 12755, 12759 ff., 12763 f.) or that their fertilizing, plowing, planting, harvesting, and pruning are carried out in keeping with time-tested folk practices (Cannon, nos. 12962, 12956, 12963 ff., *passim*, 13122 ff., *passim*).

It seems a safe conjecture that the availability of scientific information on these matters has materially weakened traditional views in rural American folk-life. The late William R. Bascom found folklore a motivating and even coercive

¹ Folklorists have not paid sufficient attention to the geographical factors influencing the dissemination of folklore to different parts of the country. I have sketched these problems, at least for the western part of the country, in a recent article, "Folklore at the Crossroads of the West," *Kansas Quarterly*, 13 (1981): 7-15.

² See Bernard DeVoto, *The Year of Decision, 1846* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1943).

³ Anthon S. Cannon, et al., *Popular Beliefs and Superstitions from Utah* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, forthcoming), no. 5794. Hereinafter cited parenthetically in text by author and item number.

force.⁴ This assertion of social control, possible in rigidly structured primitive societies, cannot be made in contemporary European and American cultures. In such societies, perhaps the best examples of what Bascom had in mind come from situations in which man is confronted by imponderable forces. In terrible thunderstorms, people reacting in panic may crawl under a feather bed for protection or sit on a down-filled pillow if such tales have been part of their folklore (Cannon, no. 11377). By the same token they will avoid standing under a tree during a lightning storm (Cannon, no. 11392) or rush to a doorframe during an earthquake (Cannon, no. 11499).

Perusal of folklore collections suggests that folk beliefs and superstitions arise naturally out of situations of hazard and doom.⁵ Consider, for example, the fabric of odd beliefs attached to such hazardous occupations as mining, the sea, lumbering, steel works, dams, and high voltage electricity: the ghosts of dead miners haunting the spot in the mines where they were killed; sailors placing a silver coin at the base of the mast to assure adequate wind; lumberjacks, upon going to bed, pointing their shoes in the direction of another lumbering camp where they hope to find better working conditions; workers dreading the appearance of a woman in the steel mills and the bad luck that is sure to follow; workmen throwing coins into the first concrete poured in dams or other construction jobs to prevent accidents, etc.

Physical hazard is bad enough; far worse, however, are pursuits fraught with psychological hazard such as the stage, stock market operations, gambling, and sports: actors opening a play in a dirty shirt and refusing to put on a clean one until the success of the run is assured; stock market investors consulting mediums for favorable auspices; gamblers turning their hat or coat to change their luck; batters going through a set routine to continue a hitting streak, etc.

⁴ In the almost thirty years since the appearance of William R. Bascom's famous article, "Four Functions of Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore* 67 (1954): 333-49, much has been written on the various functions of folklore. Unfortunately much of it has been doctrinaire and subject to current trends. The ideas of generations of earlier workers have been thoughtlessly swept away. A moderate and wise approach is Barre Toelken *The Dynamics of Folklore* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977). This work has broken new ground in the treatment of structuralism, matrix and context, performance and function, social validation and control, communication and lexical values, and numerous other subjects emphasized in the "new folklore."

Social control is a complex topic. In many European cultures spinning, weaving, and sewing can be undertaken only at prescribed times for fear of offending the Virgin Mary who presides over the distaff. This body of folklore in America (Cannon, no. 6640) has created an almost universal taboo against sewing on Sunday. Utah variations include removing the sewn stitches with one's nose on Monday or, in the afterlife, often with a double ratio of stitches to be removed to every one sewn (Cannon, no. 6566).

These consequences seem harsh, particularly in earlier periods of American history when a woman would customarily sew and entertain guests simultaneously, Sundays included. One is hard put to believe these folk punishments were taken with more than a smile, even though many women doubtless forewent sewing on the Sabbath day out of religious principle.

⁵ See prefatory discussion in *Popular Beliefs and Superstitions from North Carolina*, ed. Wayland D. Hand, as vols. 6-7 (1961-64) of *The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore*, 7 vols. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1952-1964), no. 6329 (Oklahoma and Texas references), hereinafter cited as Brown Collection.

Illegal activity, where exposure and arrest are continuous threats, has spawned underworld folk beliefs and superstitions, unfortunately little collected in Utah. However, in more mundane circumstances, folk beliefs and superstitions usually influence our thoughts and actions peripherally, although a belief in the supernatural will increase the influence of superstition and folklore.

In any religious community, the extension of belief beyond strictly ecclesiastical boundaries is facilitated by the ease with which sacred and profane elements of folklore mingle. This occurs because both realms, despite important differences, offer essentially analogous perceptions of a supernatural power that governs the universe and controls the destiny of man himself. What makes it difficult to distinguish whether the source of power is either beneficent or diabolical is the awe supernatural force evokes. Even distinctions between white and black magic are unavailing, since the sorcerer often employs religious symbolism or Christian formulae, and even invokes the name of God, the Virgin Mary, and the saints.⁶

Further confusion arises from the fact that Mormons, and Christians in general, not knowing much about conjury, do not regard it as an importation from Africa and the Caribbean but have seen it as originating almost exclusively in the Christian devil. Church-goers have been taught to shun Satan's enticings and to beware of him who can quote scripture, if need be, to deceive the very elect. The devil's central role in the Christian polarity of good and evil explains the ready confusion of the profane with the sacred in folklore and in popular theology.

"Speak of the devil, and he is bound to appear." The best source for a study of Mormon popular traditions regarding the devil is Austin and Alta Fife's classic *Saints of Sage and Saddle*, now happily back in print.⁷ Joseph Smith's casting out the devil in the celebrated case of Newel Knight dates from the earliest period of the church. Newel, after retiring to a secluded grove for private prayer,

was seized by an unseen power which bound his tongue. He returned home and was again seized by this terrible power. He fell to the floor, his face and limbs twisting and turning in strange contortions, until finally his entire body was caught up and tossed about the room.

⁶ In some areas of the country, as the late Harry Middleton Hyatt's magnificent five-volume work, *Hoodoo, Conjuration, Witchcraft, Rootwork* (Quincy, Ill.: Alma Egan Hyatt Foundation, 1970-78), clearly demonstrates, the syncretism of sacred and secular is so complete as to be almost impossible to disentangle. This interplay has its limits. Although devotees of the black art are eager to invest their rituals with a patina of Christian faith and symbolism, there is no give and take on the other side. Christian practitioners and workers of white magic reject out of hand religious or magical forms that are believed to stem in any way from the evil one or what they vaguely think of as the powers of darkness. Many believe that even a healing from the wrong source will inevitably prove to be a curse.

⁷ Austin E. Fife and Alta S. Fife, *Saints of Sage and Saddle: Folklore of the Mormons* (1956; reprint ed., SLC: University of Utah Press, 1980), hereinafter cited parenthetically in text as Fife by item number.

The family was in a panic, a crowd assembled, and Joseph was sent for. As the Prophet entered the room, Newel managed to tell him that he was possessed of some evil spirit and begged him to rebuke it (Fife, p. 28).

Joseph did so, commanding the spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ, to depart. The spirit of the Lord then visited Newell and "lifted him from the bed in which he had been placed until his head and shoulders touched the ceiling" (Fife, pp. 28-29).

The Prophet Joseph himself had suffered a similar diabolic visitation soon after he received the golden plates:

No sooner had the angel delivered the plates to Joseph than a satanic personage made a desperate attempt to wrest them from him. But the Prophet, who was a man of great strength and prowess in the art of wrestling, engaged his spirit-adversary in a hand-to-hand struggle which lasted for several hours. Joseph's father went to his rescue — and just in time, too, for, having grown exasperated with the stubborn persistence of the Prophet, the devil had conjured up a whirlwind which was throwing tree trunks and branches wildly about. Belabored soundly by the blows of his opponent, Joseph had fallen to the ground with a severe bruise on his side. His father took him home fatigued and injured but still in triumphant possession of the golden plates. A variant of this story says that Joseph's adversaries were three strangers whose blows he was able to ward off unaided, although he arrived home in a complete state of exhaustion and with his golden scriptures intact (Fife, pp. 37-38).

The appearance of the devil in the form of a whirlwind squares well with the folklore that command of the elements — wind, lightning and thunder, tempests, hail, etc., — is standard in the devil's repertory; so, also, is jostling, pummeling, throttling, and other kinds of physical abuse.⁸ The Mormon phrase, "turned over to the buffetings of Satan," is no figurative phrase in folk belief. The devil controls the waters (Cannon, no. 10164); he also has power after midnight (Cannon, no. 10166). Furthermore, a goat on a bridge at night is possessed of the devil (Cannon, no. 10197). If it rains while a man is dying or if lightning strikes near his house, the devil has come for his soul (Cannon, no. 10206). If you open a door to the wind, you're inviting the devil in (Cannon, no. 10223), and to whistle in the house also invites the devil to enter (Cannon, no. 10221) because of his known proclivity for dancing. Furthermore, if you whistle, you are providing music for the devil to dance to (Cannon, no. 10222).

These last two items are examples of cautionary beliefs used to inculcate good manners, in which the devil has been lumped with bogey figures to enforce proper social conduct and decorum.⁹ In the interplay between religious

⁸ For a reference to the devil's riding in whirlwinds, see the reference to "dust devils" in the Brown Collection, 7:256, no. 6329. See also Abraham Warkentin, *Die Gestalt des Teufels in der deutschen Volkssage* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Chicago, 1937; privately printed, Bethel, Kansas, 1937). Cf. Fife, p. 138 and Cannon et al., "Popular Beliefs and Superstitions from Utah."

⁹ John D. A. Widdowson, *If You Don't be Good: Verbal Social Control in Newfoundland*, Social and Economic Studies, No. 21 (St. John's, Newfoundland: Institute of Social and Economic Research, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1977).

and worldly values, the Christian church has sometimes found it convenient to use the devil to punish offenders. Folktales warn card players of dangers for those who desecrate the Sabbath by dancing: they may have a face-to-face showdown with the devil, seeing his cloven hoof and smelling his sulfurous stench (Cannon, no. 10202).

An interesting Mormon distinction is differentiating angels. Joseph Smith announced a revelation in 1843 specifying that when asked to identify himself an angelic messenger will extend a tangible hand in greeting. If the visitor is the devil posing as an angel, he will extend his hand, but the questioner will not be able to feel it.¹⁰ Popular tradition records a colloquium with the spirit or ghost and a direct question: "What in the name of the Lord do you want with me?"¹¹ At this question, the demonic visitor retires without further parley from a superior power.

Formal pacts with the devil are rare in Utah tradition, and I have not seen published accounts of the more plebeian exchange of one's soul for learning to play the fiddle, casting the magically accurate bullet, sewing the seamless seam, procuring great wealth, gaining the favors of beauteous women, and so on. There is in the making, however, a cycle of missionary stories wherein the missionary seeks to learn the power of the devil as part of learning of the existence of God. The seeker usually dies a violent death. These accounts are reminiscent of the Faust legend and the fatal end of his search for hidden knowledge.

The Utah tradition, however, contains accounts derived from the "devil-outwitted" cycle of legends.¹² In exchange for building a bridge or some public edifice — most often a church — the devil bargains for the first living thing to cross the portal. He plans on a human soul, but he is tricked with an animal or barnyard fowl sent in ahead of the first human entrant. More systematic collecting, especially among people with European roots, would doubtless yield more contests of wit with the devil and also formal Faustian pacts. Of course, gaining wealth, position, and the favors of women with demonic assistance are common but rarely include a formal pact (Cannon, no. 10219). Almost invariably in Utah folklore, the sinner comes under the devil's power by sin or other lack of moral vigilance.

Witchcraft is less well documented in Utah than devil lore, even though witches derive their powers from the devil and do his bidding. However, the one account of a witch among backsliding Mormons in Providence, just outside of Logan, is a classic.

One evening a boy who had been recovering from a long illness suddenly began to cry and couldn't be quieted. It was discovered that an old renegade was standing out-

¹⁰ D&C 129:4-8. Cf. Cannon, no. 10593, no. 10250, where the devil is identified with an evil spirit, and M. Hamlin Cannon, "Angels and Spirits in Mormon Doctrine," *California Folklore Quarterly*, 4 (1954): 343-50.

¹¹ Brown Collection, 7:142-143, no. 5725.

¹² Cannon, no. 10207, Fife, p. 219, *passim*, for an account of the devil obstructing the building of the Nauvoo Temple. For a general treatment of legends of the devil outwitted, see August Wünsche, *Der Sagenkreis vom geprellten Teufel* (Leipzig und Wien: Akademischer Verlag, 1905).

side the window in his temple robes. When they chased him away the sick boy became quiet. It was known that the wife of this man did not dare to pass under steel. Once during a rainstorm she stopped at a neighbor's home. While she was drying herself, a knitting needle was slipped into the rafter over her head. Her clothes suddenly began to steam and she was in agony until the needle was removed. On another occasion neighbors, seeing her approach, hastily put a paring knife in the cranny above the door. Maliciously they invited her in. Although she tried several times, she could not cross the sill. Later several young men decided to do away with her. She was lured into the hills and stoned to death. (Fife, pp. 261-262)

Profanation of temple garments, the use of steel knitting needles as an apotropaic, the witch being consumed by her own bodily heat, the inability to cross a charmed door sill, and the stoning of the witch by irate townspeople are all standard elements of witchcraft lore. Although there are few such stories in print, many doubtless persist in oral tradition. The entries on witchcraft in the Cannon Utah collection, though fewer than a hundred, are rich and varied enough to show that the repertory in Utah is much larger than the published record indicates.

Putting on a dress or stockings inside out to ward off witchery and other kinds of magical harm is common (Cannon, nos. 10075f.) but the even more prevalent magical practice of turning the pockets inside out has apparently not found its way into the Utah collection, except when one is passing a haunted spot (Cannon, no. 10648). However, urinating in the fireplace to drive off witches, a method little known outside Utah, is documented from localities as widely separated from each other as Providence and St. George (Fife, p. 262; Cannon, no. 10082). In both reports, a child performs this warding act as an agent of innocence.¹³

¹³ Wayland D. Hand, *Magical Medicine: The Folkloric Component of Medicine in the Folk Belief, Custom, and Ritual of the Peoples of Europe and America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 48-49). Witches in the Cannon Utah collection show classic attributes, functions, and such familiars as cats, rats, wolves, and owls. Owls were associated with witches from Chaldean times, an association that is particularly strong in Italy and Spain, from which it ultimately found its way to Mexico where both owls and witches are referred to as *tecolotes*.

The attributes and functions of witches, many borrowed from *ōr* shared with other creatures of lower mythology, are found throughout the Utah corpus. A witch cannot weep, has a hidden birthmark, casts no shadow, has eyebrows that meet, never looks you in the face, fears water and cannot cross it, dresses in black, may be a redhead, and may rove at midnight, particularly when the moon is full (Cannon, nos. 10031-32, 10045-53).

They are associated with brooms and sweeping (10030, 10034, 10047, 10069) use eggshells as boats (10038) (prudent housewives crush shells), harass humans with bad luck, sickness, and witch-riding — in which the victim is saddled, bridled, and ridden all night to exhaustion (10057, 10067). The working of evil (the *maleficium*) extends also to barnyard animals, particularly to cows (Cannon, no. 12766 [legend]), and to butter and milk products (5889 *passim*, 12766, 12799, 12803). In fact, magical influences in the dairy are the single most common feature of witchcraft in America.

Protection against witchcraft is essentially magical but with frequent resort to religious prayers and other offices, to sacred objects and utensils and churchyard dirt (10056, 10077). Perhaps because belief in old wives' tales was often discouraged in Utah, to my knowledge, Mormon elders have never been called in to perform an exorcism, as they have to cast out the devil and evil spirits. However, the elders may simply not have been needed. Horseshoes, a silver pen, and other iron or steel objects will put witches to flight as will knives, shears, or scissors which, when opened, gain the added power of the Christian cross (10067, 254,

Both conjury and the casting of spells are fairly well represented in Utah folklore, another area where the sacred and the profane have crossbred. Magical elements shared between witchcraft and conjury in the Cannon Utah collection include the contrasexual transfer of magical power, the abuse of witch dolls and puppets, and the vicarious affliction of a victim through the use of images or pictures (Cannon 10092, 10099–10108). The use of hair, nail parings, excrement, and blood, however, would appear to have infiltrated witchcraft from the more primitive ideas of conjury (Cannon, nos. 10110–10116).¹⁴ Clothing and personal belongings also can be fashioned into conjure bags or “hands” and “tricken bags” to be manipulated against the intended victim (Cannon, nos. 10117ff.).

Regarding the casting of spells, Scottish, Greek, Italian, and other European informants have given the Utah Collection a fairly respectable body of lore dealing with the evil eye. Compliments, or fulsome praise, often engendered by envy,¹⁵ can bring on sickness and even death to those on whom the baleful glance is cast (Cannon, nos. 10143, 10145f.). This evil stare can afflict animals, plants, food, and coveted objects (Cannon, nos. 10143–47). An unusual way to abate the evil eye and turn the evil back on the perpetrator is to wear a charm resembling an eye, reported in 1964 by two independent Salt Lake informants of different generations, neither one originating in a country where belief in the evil eye is prevalent.¹⁶ There are no beliefs and practices about the

10080). Salt and brooms are also effective (10060, 10069–70). Changelings can be prevented by placing the blade of an axe under the crib, and labor pains can be eased (244, 252, 267, 306). The most spectacular use of metal is casting a silver bullet to shoot a homemade witch effigy through the heart (10083). Of a wide variety of apotropaic plants, I find only the use of garlic and hawthorn in witchcraft proper (10150, 10234, 10295, 10072f.), but asafetida, mistletoe, pepper, red pepper, and various other herbs are used to combat evil and other kinds of magical harm (10133f., 10150, 10293–97, 10072f.).

Burning witches is a legacy from the Inquisition, and not a folk tradition (10054f., 10081, 10088). It comes as a surprise, therefore, to hear of the burning of a supposed witch's shack in Provo Canyon, time not given, as reported by a young informant from Logan in 1970. The witch woke up too late to escape and was consumed in the flames. “If you go up there now,” the girl reported, “you can hear her screaming” (10089). In another account, a woman suspected of witchcraft was taken into the mountains by townspeople to be burned. Before she was put to the torch, she cursed the settlement of Mendon and the tree against which she was tied. The male informant, age nineteen, claims that Mendon has not prospered and that the tree stands alone and forbidding (10058). A witch, before her alleged beheading at River Heights — no date — vowed she would return. Various people claim to have seen her head on the stake, locally known as “Bloody Stake,” laughing and jeering at passersby (10085). One German informant in Salt Lake City in 1938 claimed witches die with the falling of a star (9586, 10039) — a syncretism of Christian and pagan ideas. For fuller documentation on witches see Brown Collection, 7:115–18, nos. 5606–5608, 439–43, nos. 7531–7552, *passim*, 134–35, nos. 5691, 5697–98.

¹⁴ For the problem of African origins see Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1941), Newbell Niles Puckett, *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1926), and Tom Peete Cross, “Witchcraft in North Carolina,” *Studies in Philology* 16 (1919): 217–87.

¹⁵ George M. Foster, “The Anatomy of Envy: A Study in Symbolic Behavior,” *Current Anthropology*, 13 (1972): 165–202, esp. p. 174 *passim*.

¹⁶ S. Seligmann, *Der böse Blick und Verwandtes: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Aberglaubens aller Zeiten und Völker*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Hermann Barsdorf Verlag, 1910).

evil eye in Mormon religious tradition comparable to those of Utah Catholic and Greek Orthodox congregations.

A more significant wedding of folklore with Mormon religious traditions has occurred in the area of mining and treasure-hunting. Dowsing for precious metal in Utah was carried out earlier according to established procedures and rituals practiced elsewhere in the West with the customary variety of wooden dowsing rods, conventional mineral rods, and so-called doodlebugs.¹⁷ (Water witching seems to have been associated with magnetism, sympathetic attraction, and other natural principles more than with magic.) Seeking buried treasure was somewhat suspect, since it involved conjury and pitted the seeker against supernatural guardians of buried treasure. In the earliest period of Mormon history, Joseph, Sr. and his sons, occasionally employed to dig wells, acquired a reputation for being water wizards, able to locate water with a forked stick. Later, far more fabulous stories arose concerning the young Joseph's power to locate buried treasure with a peepstone in which he reportedly saw "gold, buried coins and treasures, salt, water, lost animals, future events, and other remarkable things." Stories conflict whether he was "a superstitious bumpkin or, even less to his credit, a scurrilous hoaxer, using the seerstone to dupe investors" (Fife, pp. 110-14).¹⁸

These New England and Pennsylvanian treasure tales recall a body of material familiar in German and European folklore. As I searched contemporary American traditions chronicled by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers, I found tales of the *Erdspiegel* (earth mirror), a device for divining what lies beneath the surface of the earth, which has been used for generations, and is still found in the folklore of the Pennsylvania-German country.¹⁹

The use of peepstones in Utah is reported, so far as I know, only in the Logan area, but may have been known in other parts of the state. The woman who used the peepstone in Cache Valley recovered lost items and located straying livestock but was not involved in treasure seeking (Cannon, nos. 10666, 10433, 12801). According to the Fifes, this fabled stone also revealed two "peepstone brides," beautiful twins destined for plural marriage (Fife, pp. 166-67).

In my earliest writings on the folklore of western mining I became interested in dream mines and, in 1940, after reading about Jesse Knight's Humbug Mine in the Tintic district, sought out Bishop John Koyle to learn more about

¹⁷ Wayland D. Hand, "Folklore from Utah's Silver Mining Camps," *Journal of American Folklore* 54 (1941): 132-61, esp. pp. 135-37; hereinafter cited *JAF*; and Wayland D. Hand, "California Miners' Folklore: Above Ground," *California Folklore Quarterly* 1 (1942): 24-46, esp. 34-36.

¹⁸ See also Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd ed., rev. and enlarged (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), pp. 16-33, and Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Joseph Smith & Money Digging* (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm Company, 1970).

¹⁹ Ann Hark, "Erdspiegel Mystery," *American-German Review* 7 (June 1941): 9-11, and Wayland D. Hand, "The Quest for Buried Treasure: A Chapter in American Folk Legendry," in *Folklore on Two Continents: Essays in Honor of Linda Degh*, ed. Nikolai Burlakoff and Carl Lindahl (Bloomington, Ind.: Trickster Press, 1980), pp. 112-19.

the Salem Dream Mine. Most memorable of all the things I heard from him, from people who had worked in the mine and from reading Norman C. Pierce's unpublished history of the mine was the presence of supposed chambers deep in the recesses of the earth filled with precious metals by Nephite miners. According to the bishop, this treasure would remain inviolate until the Church was financially imperiled as had been the case during the panic of 1907 when Jesse Knight reportedly saved the Church from bankruptcy with his mine. The subterranean treasure hall accords with the well-known European mountain caverns piled high with jewels and precious metals and guarded by dwarfs.²⁰ However, Brigham Young, more than sixty years before Bishop Koyle's time, had spoken of buried treasures moving about "according to the good pleasure of Him who made them and owns them" within the earth, a theme probably inspired by Book of Mormon accounts.²¹ Martin Harris, perhaps from the same source, had attributed the sinking of the golden plates back into Hill Cumorah to "slippage."²²

Spirits who guard buried treasures, night digging by moonlight, strict demands for secrecy and silence, and the theories of sinking treasure, slippage, and movement within the earth, are part of treasure lore handed down from ancient times in Europe and brought to America early.²³ However, Mormon lore assigns beneficent guardians to the earth's treasures and divine purposes to their movements. This view is a radical departure from the usual association of treasure with the devil and other creatures of lower mythology.

Before pursuing the infusion of nonreligious lore into Mormon popular theology further, we should mention the purely Mormon cycle of legends dealing with the Three Nephites, one of the most prolific genres of religious folk-

²⁰ See Hand, "Utah Silver Mining," pp. 137-40, esp. 138-39, and *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, eds., Eduard von Hoffmann-Krayer and Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli, 10 vols. (Berlin and Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1927-1942, 7:1004-5, s.v. *Schatz*. Hereinafter cited as *HDA*.

²¹ Brigham Young, address at Farmington, Utah, 17 June 1877, *Journal of Discourses*, 19:36-39, as cited in Hand, "Treasure," p. 116; from Tanner and Tanner, *Joseph Smith & Money Digging*, pp. 2-3; Hel. 13:34-36.

²² As cited in Hand, "Treasure," p. 115-116; from Tanner and Tanner, *Joseph Smith & Money Digging*, p. 2; cf. *HDA* 7:1008-9.

²³ Hand, "Treasure," p. 115; *HDA* 7:1004-7, 1:1079, 1080, s.v. *Berggeister*. See also Byrd Howell Granger, *A Motif Index for Lost Mines and Treasures Applied to Redaction of Arizona Legends, and to Lost Mine and Treasure Legends Exterior to Arizona*, Folklore Fellows Communications, No. 218 (Helsinki, Finland, and Tucson, Ariz.: University of Arizona Press, 1977), pp. 220-25, motif g. (This is a reasonably complete survey of the guardians of treasure, from all kinds of humans, including ghosts, to various animal creatures, including dragons and snakes, supernatural creatures of all kinds, etc.) See also motif h 1.5 (night); h 1.6.2 (full moon); motif h 3.1, h 4.6 (ways to keep treasure from moving or changing), and Cannon, no. 10462.

Carefully collecting folk beliefs from Mormon converts from the British Isles, Germany, the Low Countries, Scandinavia, etc., would have altered the picture appreciably. People from these countries have come to Utah for a century and a quarter. Their folklore would certainly help fill the gaps and we have barely tapped this prime source of information. Recent collecting of lore from Italy and Slavic and Balkan Europe in Utah's mining and smelting towns is at best a beginning.

lore in America today. Collection did not begin until 1938; but thanks to the work of the Fifes, Hector Lee, and William A. Wilson, scores of texts have been put on the record, with Wilson's unpublished collection running to over a thousand entries.²⁴ According to the Book of Mormon, the resurrected Christ visited the Americas, chose twelve disciples, and offered them the blessing of their choice before his departure. Three chose to continue their ministry until their master's second coming (3 Ne. 28:1-12).

In their modern-day ministrations, especially prior to 1940, the Three Nephites reportedly were kindly, sainted ministrants, clothed in flowing white robes or other unusual garb, who possessed superhuman speed, appeared suddenly and, after giving help or advice, left as mysteriously as they had arrived. Typical events include miraculous rescues, food supplied to the starving, aid to missionaries, crucial genealogical information, various advice, and prophetic messages. These motifs have endured throughout several generations of religious narratives. More recent cycles of stories since the 1950s and 1960s have emphasized the necessity of following Church counsel to store food. Sometimes these accounts have a prophetic and even apocalyptic ring and seem related to stories of the vanishing hitchhiker linked to the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago.²⁵

Although the Nephite stories belong to the genre of folk narratives rather than folk beliefs, the Cannon Utah collection contains three somewhat unusual variants. In the first, a serious cave-in in the Park City mines in the 1880s traps several miners. A form in a yellow slicker appears and leads them to safety. As the last miner crawls out, they turn to thank their benefactor, but he has disappeared (Cannon, no. 9960). Features of the dire need, of the help given, and of the sudden disappearance are normal, but the yellow slicker — standard miner's garb for wet mineworks — is an exceptional adaptation, and perhaps a bid for credibility.

The next account may not be a Nephite story at all, even though it tells of an unknown ministrant arriving at a time of need, providing help, and leaving unceremoniously. The circumstances are unusual: the visitor is a woman who arrives mysteriously to help a plural wife who is giving birth hiding in a barn while her husband is in prison (Cannon, no. 261).

²⁴ See Wayland D. Hand, "The Three Nephites in Popular Tradition," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 2 (1938): 123-29; A. E. Fife, "The Legend of the Three Nephites Among the Mormons," *JAF* 53 (1940): 1-49; Austin E. Fife, "Popular Legends of the Mormons," *California Folklore Quarterly* 1 (1942): 122-25; Fife and Fife, pp. 233-249; Hector Lee, *The Three Nephites: The Substance and Significance of the Legend in Folklore*, University of New Mexico Publications in Language and Literature, no. 2 (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1949); William A. Wilson, "Mormon Legends of the Three Nephites Collected at Indiana University," *Indiana Folklore* 2 (1969): 3-35; and his "The Vanishing Hitchhiker among the Mormons," *Indiana Folklore* 8 (1975): 79-97.

²⁵ Richard K. Beardsley and Rosalie Hankey, "The Vanishing Hitchhiker," *California Folklore Quarterly* 1 (1942): 303-35. Wayland D. Hand, "The Three Nephites," *American Notes and Queries* 2 (1942-43): 56-57 shows the affinities of the Nephite stories to the legend of the vanishing hitchhiker. See also Wilson, "Vanishing Hitchhiker."

The third example, even less clearly a Nephite story, may best be a classic example of substitution, adaptation, and associative thinking. The account dates from 1945, and no locality is mentioned; but the story itself deals with people living in a rural settlement at a much earlier date. At conference time, a woman whose husband was away on a mission awakes to find that Indians have stolen all her horses but a lame one. The family resolutely sets out but only gets partway there. The mother assures the frightened children that the Lord will provide. At once a white horse appears out of nowhere and they proceed to town. As soon as the animal is unhitched, "it just disappeared" (Cannon, no. 9956). Once again, the desperate need for help, the mysterious appearance, and then the equally mysterious disappearance accord with the Nephite paradigm.²⁶ The horse's color would likely echo the white attire of the Nephites current in the versions circulating at the time the event took place. An added folkloric dimension, of course, is the white horse as a symbol of good luck or magic, dating from Indo-European times.²⁷

What does this sketch of Utah folklore tell us about the moral sanctions and ethical considerations of its people? First, of course, we must appreciate that Utah's folklore distinctly reflects its non-Mormon cultural roots even though present-day religious proscriptions and taboos generally stem from earliest biblical times. Accounts in the Utah corpus range from the punishment that comes from taking God's name in vain (Cannon, no. 9656), blatant challenges to God's commandments and profanations of holy ordinances, to lesser moral offenses and personal sins and transgressions. The graver offenses exist almost exclusively in oral tradition. The most prominent of these deals with the brother of an apostle supposedly struck dumb around the turn of the century when he tried to anoint and bless a fence post, a story I first heard from my father in the 1920s (Cannon, no. 2690). A local legend circulating in the East Mill Creek section of Salt Lake County concerns an apostate woman's being trampled to death in a violent electrical storm when she goes to the barn to quieten the terror-stricken horses, a tradition in my ex-wife's family (cf. Cannon, no. 11389). Memorates of this kind, where reasonable information control is maintained within families and extended family groups over considerable periods of time, can no doubt be multiplied from all Mormon communities in Utah and surrounding states. The widespread Latin-American legend of *El Mal Hijo* (*Hija*), well known throughout the Spanish Southwest, has also been recovered in Utah. An evil child who raises its arm against its parents is cursed.²⁸ In the Utah variant, the sinner is swallowed up in the earth for

²⁶ For the phenomenon of animals leading people to safety see Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature. A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books and Local Legends*, 6 vols. (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1955-58, B151.1.1 (horse determines road to be taken). See also Alexander Haggerty Krappe, "Guiding Animals," *JAF*, 55 (1942): 228-46.

²⁷ See my extended treatment of these matters in Brown Collection, 6:xxiv-xxvi.

²⁸ T. M. Pearce, "The Bad Son (*El Mal Hijo*) in Southwestern Spanish Folklore," *Western Folklore* 9 (1950): 295-301, cf. Cannon, no. 9845.

the sacrilegious offense of dancing in a church (Cannon, no. 8621).²⁹

Lesser offenses include not only infractions of religious precepts, but also violations of nature: a person killing a lizard invokes the death penalty on himself, disaster will overtake anyone killing a mocking bird, and a person breaking an owl's wings must himself suffer broken limbs, a Utah variant of the well-known penalty for killing a wren (Cannon 9515, 12274, 3500).³⁰

The range of punishments for personal transgressions is somewhat less severe. Liars are punished by blisters, cankers, or perhaps styes (Cannon, nos. 3027, 3141, 4086). (The more frequent explanation of these pesky eye infections, however, is that one has heeded nature's call on the road or in some other public place or is an inveterate bedwetter (Cannon, nos. 4087–89).³¹ Clearly, many of these admonitory folk beliefs are akin to the bogeymen figures used to threaten young children.

Sexual matters call forth a wide range of punishments. The most extreme case is the biblical doctrine that one's children and their descendants will be punished as well. Sterility, for example, attaches to children born out of wedlock and to those who masturbate, practice onanism, or use contraceptives (Cannon, nos. 35–39).³² Mental deficiencies, too, may result from sexual excesses and be transmitted to an illegitimate child (Cannon, nos. 1009, 1011). Health prescriptions against a pregnant woman's using alcohol and tobacco are reinforced by folk notions that such indulgence produces feeble-minded offspring (Cannon, nos. 999, 1000).

Whether these punishments are, or ever were, more than idle threats is a matter that deserves a special study. In most matters not involving sins, capital offenses, or open defiance of the constituted authority, — all matters in which society has other mechanisms of enforcement — widespread social control through folklore is fairly unlikely. Conformity, however, can be powerfully encouraged by genres of ancient folklore that flourished until rather recently — fables, exemplary literature, legends, jokes, proverbs, and facetiae. With remarkable insight into human nature, Petrus Alphonsi, one of the earliest redactors of European folktales, pointed out in the *Disciplina clericalis* (ca. 1110) that the painful predicaments resulting from pride and venality are an excellent way to teach more reasoned choices.

By contrast, this paper has focused on folk belief and superstition as seen in the important *einfache Form*. This genre of folklore, one of the most basic and pervasive, brushes aside all indirect literary approaches and symbolic rep-

²⁹ The Norwegian provenience of this item would argue for a general acceptance of sinking into the earth as a curse. See Franz Schmarsel, *Die Sage von der untergegangenen Stadt*, Litterarhistorische Forschungen, No. 53 (Berlin 1913).

³⁰ Brown Collection, no. 814, 7239.

³¹ See Wayland D. Hand, "Padepissers and Wekschissers: A Folk Medical Inquiry into the Cause of Styes," in the author's *Magical Medicine*, pp. 261–72.

³² See Widdowson, *If You Don't Be Good*, esp. ch. 4; for a general treatise on this subject see my article, "Deformity, Disease, and Physical Ailment as Divine Retribution," in *Magical Medicine*, pp. 57–68.

resentations. Folk belief, as opposed to folk literature, usually lays out in stark relief what kinds of results follow ill-conceived acts of volition. There are few gray areas. All is black and white. However, since this type of folk belief rarely involves moral or ethical choices, the present-day influence of folklore is almost certainly not as great as folklorists are wont to believe.

One must be cautious, then, in assessing the prevalence of belief in magic and the supernatural in the folklore of Utah — or anywhere else.³³ Folklore can indeed throw light on many subjects, but most tellingly it does so on what eighteenth-century writers referred to as the shadowy sides of human nature. Rather than regarding folk belief as a significant moral and social force, then, one could more profitably and properly investigate it as a guide to people's perceptions of nature and of life, their fantasies and whims, their emotional and spiritual needs, their aesthetic sensibilities and their feeling for the indwelling forces that bind man to nature. At even deeper levels of experience, folklore caters to man's sense of the mystery that underlies life and veils the inscrutable forces of nature. It is in the realm of the spirit, then, that folklore finds its most useful applications. Popular beliefs and customs in Utah urgently invite a more thorough collection of field data and deeper psycho-sociological analysis by folklorists, behavioral scientists, and cultural historians.

³³ An example of excessive claims for folklore is the Pre-Romantic German poet Gottfried August Bürger, speaking in 1776 of the power of folk poetry. He said that poetry should once more become what God who made it had intended, namely, the living breath of God that wafts over the hearts and minds of the elect, awakening the sleeping and the dead, making the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, and cleansing lepers — this all to the salvation and blessing of the generations of people in this valley of travail. Bürger, writing under the pseudonym of Daniel Wunderlich, in "Aus Daniel Wunderlichs Buch," *Deutsches Museum* [Leipzig] 1 (1776): 448. See *Bürgers sämtlich Werke*, hrsg. August Wilhelm Bohtz (Göttingen: Verlag der Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1835), p. 321, my free translation.

