

Juanita Brooks, My Subject, My Sister

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I HAVE RECENTLY FINISHED WRITING A BIOGRAPHY of Juanita Brooks. The fame of this Mormon housewife and teacher from Utah's Dixie resides in the definitive books she authored about the Mountain Meadows massacre and its best known participant, John D. Lee. Born in 1898, Juanita lies today in a coma in a St. George nursing home. Her present debility is sad, especially for her family, but it does not diminish her achievement. Few persons outside the central hierarchy of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have had a more significant influence upon Mormon society than Juanita. The details of that influence, I hope, will be evident in my book. In this essay I would like to extend my discussion to Juanita's influence upon her biographer. Through understanding her life I came to understand a good deal about my own.

I was oblivious to Juanita's history of the massacre when it appeared in the fall of 1950. Turning seventeen that fall, I went to sleep at night listening to Patti Page sing "Tennessee Waltz" on the radio. I first learned of the massacre in a Church history class at BYU in 1953. The topic didn't disturb me because I learned about it from Joseph Fielding Smith's *Essentials in Church History*, a less than candid source. I became aware of Juanita's significance as a historian while I was a graduate student at the University of Utah during the early 1960s. However, it was not until I heard her give a talk at Weber State College in 1973 that I became motivated to read her books.

At Weber State Juanita recounted her conflict with the General Authorities over the question of publicizing the reinstatement of John D. Lee. Singled out among about fifty Latter-day Saint participants in the massacre, Lee had been excommunicated by the Church and tried and executed by the federal government. When the First Presidency informed Lee's descendants of their ancestor's posthumous reinstatement in the spring of 1961, Juanita's biography

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of the scapegoated pioneer was in the process of publication. Juanita eagerly sought permission to announce the reinstatement in her book. Threatening to rescind the action should there be any publicity about it, President David O. McKay assigned Apostle Delbert Stapley the task of dissuading Juanita. In early summer Stapley summoned Juanita to a private interview in his Salt Lake office. When she remained unmoved, the apostle recruited the assistance of prominent Lee descendants. Taking President McKay's threat seriously, anxious family leaders persuaded Juanita to fly to Phoenix and hear the pleas of an assembly of some twenty-five Lee descendants. A highly distressed Juanita eventually decided to publish the reinstatement. Her instinct proved sound: President McKay did not rescind the action, and numerous reviewers of Juanita's biography congratulated the Church for its restitution of Lee's former status.

As Juanita recounted this episode during her talk at Weber State, I was impressed, as thousands before me had been impressed, by her spunk, her integrity, and her spirit of loyal dissent. I particularly remember her account of her interview with Elder Stapley. The apostle declared categorically that God would be displeased with her publication of the reinstatement. Juanita described her response in something close to the following terms: "I didn't talk to him as a humble member speaks to an apostle; I talked to him like one ordinary person to another. I looked him in the eye and I said, 'Brother, in this matter I know the will of the Lord as well as you do.'"

Soon afterward I read Juanita's books, and in 1976 I was moved to write an essay "Juanita Brooks: The Mormon Historian as Tragedian." The point of the essay was that, as far as Latter-day Saint readers were concerned, Juanita's manner of writing and speaking about the massacre had the effect of literary tragedy. Perhaps it was because of this essay that in 1981 the University of Utah Press proposed that I write a full-length biography of Juanita. I declined this flattering proposal at that moment because I aspired to write fiction. In 1985, however, having behind me a collection of short stories and a novel, I agreed to write the biography. I wasn't cheerful about the prospect. With a mixture of uncertainty and dread I buckled down to what I knew only too well would prove a long and tedious task.

I was quickly reminded that I enjoy basic research. Throughout the summer of 1985 I spent every weekday in the library of the Utah Historical Society. I examined each item in the extensive Juanita Brooks collection and photocopied several thousand letters and manuscript pages. Toward the end of the summer I began to interview Juanita's friends and relatives. In September I made a trip to California to examine letters at the Huntington and Bancroft libraries and at Stanford University Press. All this interested me greatly. I was eager to learn what each new letter in the correspondence files would reveal, and I responded with anticipation to every interview. Furthermore, as I pursued my research, I inevitably compared myself to Juanita. My venture into her life, as I have said, proved to be a venture into my own. I discovered far more affinities between us than I had imagined.

One thing we had in common was the Mormon village. She grew up in Bunkerville, Nevada, and I grew up in Snowflake, Arizona. In numerous

writings Juanita described Bunkerville's setting: the surrounding desert and irascible river, the fields, the livestock. With an unflinching eye for the picturesque and the comic, she described the social structure of the village — church meetings, socials, and cooperative work projects. As I encountered Juanita's Bunkerville, I remembered Snowflake with greater clarity. As a boy in Snowflake I made no distinctions between the wild and the domestic. Village, fields, and mesa-studded plains belonged to the same order of being. In Snowflake I knew the source of every necessary thing. Behind each house were a garden and a barnyard from which came eggs, tomatoes, corn, and milk. One could buy shovels, shoes, and firecrackers at the ACMI, the Church-owned cooperative. Along the lanes were ripgut juniper fences constructed in pioneer times. That same aromatic juniper fueled the stoves of the village. Men and boys earned their tickets to the annual wood dance, held on Thanksgiving night, by hauling, sawing, and splitting a winter's supply for the village widows. Sometimes in good weather the entire village repaired to the nearby junipers, ate a potluck supper, and enjoyed songs and orations around a roaring bonfire built of whole trees. I remember one such occasion when a local cattleman, accompanying himself on a guitar, sang "Home on the Range." The Arizona sky stretched from horizon to horizon, ablaze with a multitude of stars that modern city dwellers can have no conception of. I was captivated by the sweet strains of this western folksong. It fixed itself in my heart, and ever after "Home on the Range" was as much a part of my patriotic store as "The Star Spangled Banner" and "The Battle Hymn of the Republic."

As my research advanced, I recognized that another thing Juanita and I had in common was our respect for ordinary people. Juanita refused to be impressed by her own achievements, accepting innumerable honors with an undeviating humility. Her inability to vaunt herself derived, I think, from her commitment to an enormous extended family. Descended from polygamists on both sides, she had dozens of uncles and aunts and hundreds of cousins. She grew up among nine siblings. She married Ernest Pulsipher when she was twenty-one, expecting to become a rural housewife. Upon Ernest's untimely death from cancer in 1921, she obtained an education and began to support herself and her son by teaching at Dixie College in St. George. She halted her teaching in 1933 to marry widower Will Brooks. Combining her son and his four sons into an instant family, Juanita and Will boldly proceeded to add a daughter and three more sons. In the meantime Juanita developed an interest in pioneer history to compensate for her interrupted teaching career. Inevitably, her pursuit of history went on amid an unrelenting domestic schedule. For years her workplace was a kitchen table and her chief working hours were between midnight and dawn. She and Will were attentive, affectionate parents, and they maintained close ties with their children after they had become adults and begun their own families. Moreover, friends and relatives dropped in on Juanita and Will on a daily basis. With good reason Juanita complained that she lacked time to write. Yet a dense entourage of loved ones and friends was essential to her happiness.

I derived from a family not unlike Juanita's and Will's. When my parents married, my father had six children and my mother two. They produced five more children, of whom I was the last. Because my half brothers and sisters had children before or soon after I was born, I grew up regarding many nephews and nieces as my peers. Furthermore, I fraternized with a crowd of cousins on both my mother's and father's side. There were informal visits, Christmas dinners, birthday parties, wedding receptions, and family reunions.

The family reunions continue. A couple of weeks ago my wife and I drove to Arizona to attend a Peterson reunion. The event was held at Lakeside, a mountain village where my father took up a homestead in 1907. My father raised his first family on that homestead; every weekend he rode his horse home from Snowflake, where he taught school. Althea and I stayed the night with a sister in Snowflake and rose early in order to visit the Lakeside cemetery before attending the reunion. My father's first wife was buried in this cemetery in 1919, my father in 1943, my mother in 1985. The little graveyard is canopied by ponderosa pines that sigh in every breeze. I led Althea to the fresh grave of my brother Arley. Scarcely three months had passed since I had been called upon to dedicate Arley's grave. As I performed this last earthly rite for Arley, I recalled that he had once performed one of the essential ordinances in my behalf. On the Fast Sunday of January 1942 he confirmed me a member of the Church. My father, who had baptized me a couple of weeks earlier in the icy waters of Silver Creek, was in Phoenix for a cancer operation.

Althea and I drove on to Flag Hollow, a beautiful opening in the forest at the opposite edge of Lakeside. Dozens of relatives milled around grills and tables where breakfast was being served: three sisters and their husbands, a brother and his wife, two widowed sisters-in-law, many nephews, nieces, and cousins, and an innumerable host of children. Hugs and greetings followed. All morning I drifted from cluster to cluster of chatting relatives, making inquiries and listening to stories. My nephew Jack recounted an adventure featuring his brother Scott. Scott asked Jack to assist him in retrieving a bear he had shot in the woods. It was Scott's opinion that one of his mares had a suitable temperament for the task. The mare, hobbled and blindfolded, trembled violently while the brothers loaded the dead predator. Released, the mare plunged and bucked and the bear flopped crazily in and out of panniers on her back. Finally she crashed into Scott, knocking him down. Fearing his brother was dead, Jack began to pump up and down on his chest. Scott opened his eyes and roared out that Jack was killing him. Jack told his story with consummate skill. He let his voice rise and fall dramatically, he invented vivid dialogue, he assumed the wild postures of the bucking horse and the flopping bear.

At lunch I teased my niece Loretta about the irreverent escapades in which her brother Dwain and I, who were inseparable companions in boyhood, engaged. Dwain died in 1982 following an operation. During the last twenty years of his life he became alienated from the Church and, to a lesser degree, from his parents and siblings. Loretta didn't laugh at my stories. She said she

hadn't wanted a barrier between her and Dwain when he had been alive and she didn't want a barrier between her and me now that he was gone. She put an arm about my waist and I put an arm about hers and shortly we were both weeping. Looking on and weeping with us was Karen, another of my nieces and Loretta's cousin. Perhaps Loretta was weeping for her dead brother and for her father, my brother Elwood, who is also dead, and most of all for her own son, recently killed in a motorcycle accident. Perhaps Karen, looking on, wept for the same dead loved ones and also for her mother, my sister Leora, who like Elwood rests in the Lakeside cemetery. As for me, I wept for the fact that each life begins in hope and ends in sorrow. I cannot express how much Loretta's arm about my waist comforted me. A family is a mystical entity, an ineffable linkage of birth, marriage, and friendship. For better or worse, its members walk the road of mortality in the supportive company of one another.

Reminders of my village origins and of my membership in a large, loving family enhanced the pleasure of my research into Juanita's life. That pleasure was also enhanced by the minor adventures I encountered along the way. I was pleased for the excuse my research gave me to consult Juanita's living relatives, who proved very cooperative. Sometimes I felt that my encounters with them produced curious convergences of past and present. There were moments when it seemed to me that I was no longer an observer of Juanita's life but an active participant in it.

That was how I felt on an afternoon I spent with Ernest Pulsipher, Jr., Juanita's eldest son. We met at the Peppermill Casino in Mesquite and drove first to the grave of Ernest's father in the Mesquite cemetery. Next we crossed the river to Bunkerville where Ernest pointed out the houses in which Juanita had lived as a girl. Then we drove to Cabin Spring, the site of a small summer ranch Juanita's father had developed at the mouth of a canyon in the Virgin Mountains. Juanita spent the summer of 1919 at Cabin Spring. She and Ernest, Sr., were engaged, and twice he rode up to visit her. Already he suffered from undiagnosed cancer in his neck. Juanita did not return his visits, though it would have required only a three-hour jog on her horse. I think she wasn't sure she wanted to marry him. In September she called unannounced on Ernest. She discovered he had experienced, only moments before her arrival, a remarkable vision of the future: one year later, he told her, she and he would become the parents of a white-haired son. That vision proved conclusive. They married, and exactly one year and one day following the vision their white-haired son was born. Within four months of the birth, Ernest died.

Following our visit to Cabin Spring, I returned with Ernest, Jr., to the casino and had a steak supper. The restaurant was pleasant but by no means exceptional. Smoke drifted, waitresses hurried here and there, diners chattered happily. For me, however, this occasion seemed utterly beyond the ordinary. All afternoon I had fancied that in coming to Mesquite and Bunkerville I had traversed time as well as space. I could not forget that my companion had been the white-haired child of the vision. Scarcely a quarter mile away was the spot where the Pulsipher ranch house had stood. There Ernest, Sr., had died. On the day of his funeral Juanita had joined his parents and brothers

in a desperate attempt to raise him from his coffin through prayer. I pitied Juanita profoundly for that fact, knowing that her extraordinary faith could have been followed only by an extraordinary disillusionment. While Ernest and I shook hands and said goodbye under the lamps of the casino parking lot, I experienced indescribable emotions. It seemed to me that the devastating events of Juanita's first marriage had just transpired and that I myself had been a witness to them.

Experiences like this, I have been saying, made my research a pleasant endeavor. In time, of course, the pleasures of concentrated research had to end, and the tedium of writing had to begin. In February 1986 I completed an outline to the biography and began to write. In July 1987 I completed a first draft consisting of twelve chapters and over nine hundred pages. I didn't neglect my task during these seventeen months; I simply couldn't work faster. I am sure I am not unusual among writers in finding the first draft the most irksome and dreary part of any writing project. In this case it seemed especially so, and I often found myself drudging forward only because I am compulsive about finishing whatever I have committed myself to.

Although chronology formed the overarching structure of Juanita's life, I had to impose upon its particulars something more coherent than their mere sequence in time. I had to record and interpret a myriad of events, influences, and personality traits. I had to measure, juggle, and position, discovering by trial and error what significance these particulars could be persuaded to assume in relation to one another. When I had arranged them in my mind, I faced the duty of casting them into sentences. Especially onerous was the unremitting necessity of groping for precise words, logical transitions, and congruent syntaxes. Furthermore, I was perpetually dissatisfied with the result. I could only hope that when I had finished the first draft I would discover therein the rudiments of a bright and engaging second draft.

I often regretted the restrictions of the genre I had chosen to work in. I was constantly reminded that a novelist disposes a wider range of technique than a biographer. A novelist can roam his imagination in search of picturesque detail and suspenseful incident. He can put words into the mouths of his characters and inspect their thoughts and feelings. He can readily enhance his style through imagery, metaphor, and other poetic devices. A biographer on the other hand is strictly limited for his material to sources which can be documented. He can't create dialogue — at least he can't if he is writing the objective, scholarly kind of biography that I aspired to write — and must only infer the unexpressed thoughts and feelings of his subject. He must generally cast his narrative in summary terms and must enhance his typically objective style by a cautious selection of colorful and figurative words.

Yet a biographer is no less obliged than a novelist to make his narrative compelling. Hence, as I scrutinized the letters, diaries, and interviews comprising the sources of Juanita's life, I remained alert for the picturesque, the unique, and the intrinsically interesting. I was looking for precisely the kind of incident and statement that I would have invented had I been writing a novel about Juanita. With a gratifying frequency she had obliged my future

need by behaving in an extraordinary fashion. Furthermore, her major topic, the Mountain Meadows massacre, gave a unity to her life very much like the unity a plot gives a novel. Her battle for the acceptance of her interpretation of the massacre was like the major conflict of a novel, assuming ever greater intensity and suspense through many episodes and coming at last to a climax and resolution.

Juanita didn't plan on becoming the minstrel of the massacre. She grew up believing Indians had committed the terrible deed. In 1919, at age twenty-one, Juanita learned that Mormons had first incited Indians to attempt the slaughter and then had assisted them in finishing the job. Among those Mormons, the astonished young woman learned, had been her grandfather Dudley Leavitt. In 1943 she traveled to Phoenix in search of documents related to a biography of Jacob Hamblin which she intended to write. Unexpectedly she encountered a bitter quarrel between certain descendants of Jacob Hamblin and John D. Lee. Hamblin's descendants maintained that Lee alone had masterminded the massacre and had been guilty of rape as well as of murder. Lee's descendants claimed that Hamblin's perjured testimony had assured their grandfather's execution. Juanita returned to St. George determined to write the history of the massacre. Encouraged by Dale Morgan, with whom she conducted an extensive correspondence, she completed her manuscript in 1948 and saw it published in 1950. Although she proceeded according to the canons of objective history, she wrote with a moral purpose. She wanted facts to replace a morbid, uninformed folklore among her fellow Latter-day Saints.

Although Juanita was neither excommunicated nor disfellowshipped for having written about the massacre, she encountered a widespread ostracism. She resented this ostracism so much that she repeatedly risked formal censure by requesting that the Church officially endorse her interpretation of the event. One therefore understands why Juanita was so eager to publish the reinstatement of John D. Lee in her soon-to-appear biography. By reinstating Lee, the Church had tacitly admitted that her interpretation was correct. I have already alluded to her courageous confrontation with Elder Delbert Stapley and with assembled dignitaries from the Lee family during the summer of 1961. In my view this was the summit of Juanita's life, an authentic climax to a conflict which had been developing for over twenty years. As I said, this conflict gave a major portion of her life's story the structural integration that a plot gives a novel.

Juanita's life derived its suspense from her insistence upon nonconformity within a church which emphasized obedience. She was an inside dissenter, a Mormon who in the spirit of constructive criticism offered counterproposals to doctrine and policy descending from the General Authorities. Although Juanita's dissent focused upon the limited matter of the massacre, the openness with which she propounded her interpretation of that event and the fervor with which she insisted upon her loyalty to the Church made her attractive to Mormon dissenters of many varieties. For over three decades liberals and fundamentalists alike sent her letters and manuscripts and sought her out in person. Some were brazen and defiant, others anxious and secretive. She openly supported a few, encouraged many, and was tolerant of all.

Today the Church is more tolerant of diversity than ever before, an attitude Juanita undoubtedly helped bring about. Still, by the standards of a democratic society the Church remains centralized and authoritarian. Juanita's example therefore remains potent. Obviously, dissent is another of the affinities between her and me. It was her dissent that first attracted me to her and later gave me my strongest impetus to write her biography. I will not boast that my dissent approaches hers in significance. It is more perverse than hers and more unlikely of realization. My dissent is important to me, if to no one else, because it is a part of my fixed personality, a necessary aspect of my kind of Mormonism.

In 1957 I returned from the French mission questioning whether I should be a Mormon at all. I soon married a gentile and decided that civilization would be my religion. But I found I couldn't sunder my connections with my extended Mormon family, I couldn't leave Utah, I couldn't fail to attend sacrament meeting a couple of times a year to see whether anything had changed. Gradually I learned that I was an authentic if eccentric Latter-day Saint. Of particular importance was my discovery of the liberal Mormon community, an informal network of intelligent Saints who, despite their unconventional opinions, have made a comfortable adaptation to the Church. Luckily my wife proved to be what is called a dry-land Mormon, a gentile who fits harmoniously into the Mormon scene.

I can discern a perverse defiance of ecclesiastic regimentation in all periods of my childhood. Once when I was a member of the Snowflake Ward priests quorum, the instructor turned the lesson period into a testimony meeting. Sitting beside me was my nephew Dwain. As we strolled homeward later, Dwain and I amused ourselves by bearing irreverent testimonies to each other. With pious voices we recounted attempts to heal a sick grandmother through prayer and to replenish a scantily stocked pantry through payment of tithing, deflecting at the climactic moment from the expected miracle into its opposite: the grandmother died, the shelves of the pantry became emptier.

I think a similar irreverence characterizes the fiction I have written in my supposedly maturer years. Shortly after my collection *The Canyons of Grace* appeared in 1982, a woman telephoned me to protest the story "Trinity." Featuring a male missionary who has recently discovered his homosexuality and a female missionary who has just had an abortion, the story would, my caller claimed, undermine the missionary effort of the Church. Although I attempted to put the best possible light upon the story, I had to admit that my protagonists could have been suffering Christians of almost any sort. It was perversity on my part to make them specifically Mormon missionaries. I think also of a scene in my novel *The Backslider* in which the boys Frank and Jeremy baptize their dog Rupert. Frank instructs his brother, "Now hold that son of a bitch tight so I can do this the way it's supposed to be done. If his foot comes out of the water, we've got to do it all over. God will send you to hell if part of you ain't under the water" (1986, 108).

Scandalizing the righteous is perhaps not a worthy form of dissent. But of course I believe my fiction also has a more dignified intent. By my own assess-

ment, the predominant theme of my fiction is the penitential aspect of Mormonism. I judge the humor of my fiction to be superficial, smacking of farce and burlesque. I infused my novel with farcical comedy as an afterthought. When I began my novel, I aspired to a poetic intensity that precluded comedy, and I wrote four unsmiling chapters. Then, weighed down by the melancholy of my topic, I paused, wrote a new first chapter mingling the serious and the comic, and in that hybridized vein went forward revising old chapters and creating new ones. Nonetheless, in my novel and in many of my stories I remain preoccupied by the dark side of Mormonism: an inordinate guilt, a dread of damnation, and a proclivity for dealing harshly with sin both in oneself and in others.

As a boy in *Snowflake* I heard the confession of an excommunicated adulteress in testimony meeting. The indelible ignominy which had fallen upon this woman horrified me. At that moment I understood, at least subliminally, that I belonged to a penitential religion. My perception of the penitential aspect of Mormonism was augmented when, as a graduate student, I first read the sermons of Brigham Young and Jedediah M. Grant on the subject of blood atonement. I was astonished, even dumbfounded, by those sermons. These venerable leaders claimed that certain sinners should cleanse their guilt through the spilling of their own blood. At present I remain sensitive to a subterranean gloom in Mormonism. I hear grim predictions of the destructions which will accompany the second coming of the Lord. I note how uncertain most Latter-day Saints are regarding their own prospects on judgment day. I even discern a significant sampling of true ascetics — Mormons who practice a stringent denial of appetite and who impose rigorous penances upon themselves for their infractions of the commandments.

It is from this penitential aspect of Mormonism that I am most consciously a dissenter. I have, as I say, depicted it variously in my fiction. In my story "The Confessions of Augustine," Fremont makes illicit love to a gentile and then abandons her because he believes God will brook no trifling with those of an erroneous faith. For Fremont true religion is a suffocating obedience. In "The Shriveprice," Darrow becomes convinced that his pioneer grandfather has committed an act of blood atonement. Taking license from his ancestor's example, Darrow plans to atone for his own ineradicable guilt by making a bloody sacrifice of himself. In "The Canyons of Grace," Arabella revolts against God by committing sexual sin and believes herself damned. She kills a polygamist patriarch who has abducted her and finds herself suddenly liberated from belief in God. So great has been God's oppression that she has symbolically killed him. These characters are alike in believing God has no patience with their fated finitude and imperfection. Whether they obey or defy him, they most decidedly do not love him. Nor do I love him. I protest the misbegotten faith that construes God in such a light.

It pleases me to conjecture that Juanita might have read my fiction with interest had it existed while she was in good health. I don't think she would have judged my depiction of guilt and penance among Latter-day Saints to be farfetched and fantastic. Despite the utter respectability of her private life and

despite the optimistic countenance she wore in public, she had few illusions about human nature. The foremost student of the Mountain Meadows massacre could scarcely have ignored the culpability, real or fancied, that lurks in the hearts of the Latter-day Saints.

A major source of my understanding of the dark side of Mormonism has been Juanita's history of the massacre. The massacre remains the single most guilty deed in the Church's entire history. Perhaps the most difficult fact about the massacre for modern Church members is that it devolved from a prayerful high council held in Cedar City some five days before the emigrants were slaughtered. In that meeting the Mormons decided to unleash their Indian allies upon the offending party from Arkansas and Missouri. Later when the Indians proved ineffectual, the Mormon militia was ordered to participate. Of course Juanita offered certain extenuations for the high council's grim decision. Like their confreres elsewhere, these Church members were in a state of war hysteria, for at that moment Johnston's army marched toward Utah with an aggressive intent. Furthermore, the emigrants had been far from tactful as they had progressed through Utah. Particularly inflammatory was the claim of some of them to have assisted in the murder of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. Numerous frontier Saints considered themselves bound by sacred oath to avenge the blood of the martyred prophets. Like many other nineteenth-century Christians, the Latter-day Saints conceived wrath to be a prominent trait of deity. They believed fervently that God would soon inaugurate the Millennium through the destruction of the wicked majority of earth's population. It was therefore not so illogical for the Mormons of southwestern Utah to propose themselves as God's instruments in the slaughter of the emigrants at Mountain Meadows. As I suggested earlier, a tendency to punish the sins of others is a part of the penitential attitude.

Because I have dealt at length with Juanita's interpretation of the massacre in my biography, I can with perhaps some justice claim in its pages to have enlarged my dissent from the penitential aspect of Mormonism. Paradoxically, however, writing the biography also renewed within me a recognition of an impulse quite the opposite of dissent. Although Juanita's example has reinforced my identity as a dissenter, it has also reinforced my submerged identity as a penitent.

Juanita had many motives for writing about the massacre. Quite late in my work on the biography it came to me that one of these motives was penitential. Unquestionably the Mormon participants in the massacre were instantly revolted by the monstrosity of their deed. Yet they clung to their rationalizations, and their fellow Saints closed protectively about them. The scapegoating of John D. Lee nearly twenty years after the massacre exacerbated rather than relieved the sense of unatoned sin. Because during all the intervening years no one else had publicly expressed contrition for the massacre, Juanita took on that duty. Through both her publications and her speeches she performed the age-old Christian ritual of confession and penance. Her desire to do penance is evident in the most notable speech of her entire life, delivered in 1955 at the dedication of a monument to the victims of the massacre in

Harrison, Arkansas. To an audience of about five hundred initially hostile non-Mormons she admitted that the massacre had been "one of the most despicable mass murders of history." Nonetheless, she went on, it had been uncharacteristic of the Latter-day Saints who carried it out. "It was tragic for those who were killed and for the children left orphans, but it was also tragic for the fine men who now became murderers, and for their children who for four generations now have lived under that shadow" (Brooks 1956, 76). Shortly afterward the president of the proceedings wrote her: "You impressed the people most favorably, and your coming has done much to establish a spirit of love and forgiveness. The Mormon Church owes you much because now the people in this section feel much better toward the Mormon people" (Fancher 1955).

As I thought about the fact that Juanita had put historiography to a penitential use, I asked myself whether I had similarly put my fiction to a penitential use. At first I posed this question almost facetiously, for, as I have indicated, I had hitherto conceived of my fiction as a protest against the penitential excesses of Mormonism. The question, once posed, returned to my thoughts over and over. In time I had to answer in the affirmative. I am not denying that in certain moods I take delight in the rebellions and misdemeanors of my characters or that I reprehend their inordinate self-punishment. I am saying that in certain other moods it is not their self-punishment which I reprehend but their sins.

I try to live by an enlightened religion. I choose to believe that God has great charity for human failing and that he expects a civilized accommodation of the appetites. But that belief — that reasoned hope — has not eradicated a very opposite set of emotions within me. Though I prefer to believe that humanity is capable of virtue and God is tolerant, I often *feel* that humanity is irretrievably flawed and God impossibly perfect. As contradictory as it may seem, I have wished in my fiction to propound the insufficiency of a rational morality. Subliminally I have joined my characters in their desire to deny the world, to mortify the flesh, to see themselves made a perfect plastic in the shaping hands of an exacting God. It will be apparent that I do not regard my characters as altogether imaginary. As far as I am concerned, they are generic Mormons, as real for my purposes as the perpetrators of the massacre were for Juanita's. Their rebellion and guilt are those of actual Latter-day Saints. And vicariously if not actually they are mine as well. I have wished to confess and do penance for their collective sins.

It was of some comfort to my mother when, about ten years ago, I began to attend sacrament meeting regularly. My mother was a very intense woman. She loved me deeply and made innumerable sacrifices in my behalf. Until her death, we visited each other frequently and wrote one another a weekly letter. Despite our affectionate relationship, she never acquiesced in the personality I had adopted upon returning from my mission. At every visit and in almost every letter she exhorted me to pay tithing, read the scriptures, baptize my wife, and otherwise obey the neglected commandments. Although my dominant impulse was to resist her wishes, I never failed to experience a desire to comply. I continue to experience that desire. Last week in church I observed a family

beside me in the pew. I particularly watched one of the sons, who seemed patient and utterly without tension or strain. The boy leaned against his father with what I imagined was a perfect satisfaction. I fancied that this boy, as he became a man, would find being a good Latter-day Saint the most natural and easy thing in the world. And I grieved that I had not grown up believing God to be kind and his commandments mild. But I also grieved that I failed to meet the challenge of the God in whom I did believe in childhood, that looming deity whose scorn for the frailty of human nature compels the disciplined and the resolute to make saints of themselves.

The ambivalence I feel toward the penitential is only one among many polarities within me. For many years, a zeal for symmetry made it difficult for me to admit that my personality is composed of contradictory impulses. I can of course comfort myself with Emerson's reassurance that "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." Or, again, I can find reassurance in Juanita's behavior. Although Juanita applied objective thought and shrewd judgment to her study of the massacre, she often demonstrated opposite qualities in the conduct of her everyday life. She was in fact a complex mixture of the critical and the credulous. She was characterized by alternating patterns of opposites: love for her native ground and attraction to the outside world, resistance to authority and willingness to cooperate with others, skeptical reason and blind faith. Luckily, she had an extraordinary capacity for tolerating these opposites. Her example has made it easier for me to admit and bear the inconsistencies within myself.

This essay has been about the private education I have undergone in researching and writing Juanita's biography. I am of course happy that the project is finished and that I can now turn to other matters. But I don't begrudge the years I have spent considering Juanita's life. I hope the book will find appreciative readers, as much for Juanita's sake as for my own. Whether the book fares well or poorly, I have already harvested my personal reward from the process of creating it. I have learned things about scholarship and composition. Unexpectedly I have learned things about writing fiction. Even more important, I have been reminded that I view the world through the eyes of a villager; that I belong to a large, affectionate family; that I dissent vigorously from the penitential side of Mormonism; and that on a subliminal level I also paradoxically assent to that stern creed.

These facts help explain why I am an irremediable westerner, if I may be forgiven for alluding to a final affinity between Juanita and me. Many times during her writing career, Juanita submitted articles and books to eastern magazines and publishers. Her only successes were two articles placed in *Harper's*. She could not compete in the eastern publishing market because her ideas and attitudes were western, rural, and Mormon. I also have made substantial submission to eastern magazines and publishers, with less success than Juanita. I flatter myself that my manuscripts were not rejected on account of incompetent writing. I think they were rejected because my subject matter is conditioned by the sensibility that geography has given me. Like Juanita, I am bound by a village, a family, a church, and a region.

I was in St. George a month ago attending the annual conference of the Utah Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters. Two or three times during my stay I drove past the nursing home in which the comatose Juanita lies. A year earlier I had stopped and asked to see her. I was tempted to stop again, but I didn't. Before leaving St. George I chatted with Juanita's son Karl and with her daughter Willa. Willa said her mother had recently suffered a congestion of the lungs. Willa wept as she described the difficulties of keeping her mother's throat and nostrils unobstructed. All who love Juanita wait for the merciful release of her death. I am of course among those who love Juanita. I will remember with affection and admiration all that she achieved. For the rest of my life I will visit her home country, Utah's Dixie, with the same intimate sense of homecoming that I experience when I return to Snowflake. She will remain a model and an inspiration to me. Writing her biography has made me her brother.

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