

# “The Strange Mixture of Emotion and Intellect”: A Social History of Dale L. Morgan, 1933-42

*Richard Saunders*

IN THE YEARS FOLLOWING THE DEPRESSION of the 1930s there rose a group of writers known informally in Latter-day Saint history as Mormonism’s “Lost Generation.” These were a diverse lot of academics and writers with familial roots in Utah but who almost always circulated outside of the state’s boundaries. Bernard DeVoto, Fawn Brodie, and Nels Anderson were three who in the mid-half of the twentieth century bolted or drifted away from the LDS church and never really left behind ties to the state or the tensions of its overwhelmingly Mormon/gentile culture. They were among the first generation of “modern” Utahns with emotional or temporal roots not directly in Mormonism’s “Pioneer Past.” Along with Brodie, Dale L. Morgan has in many ways come to symbolize the Lost Generation. Born and raised as a member of the LDS church and educated in Salt Lake City, he found that his passion for historical research drew him out of Utah in 1942. His stellar career as a student of the American fur trade and Oregon-California trail was awakened as a youth in his home town, though it would be beyond its borders that he would earn his reputation as one of Western American history’s most capable scholars.

Dale Morgan was born in 1914, the oldest child of office machine salesman James Lowell and Emily Holmes Morgan. Three more children were born to the couple before James succumbed to a lingering death from appendicitis in 1920. Left with four children under five, the independent twenty-five-year-old widow, Emily Morgan, enrolled at the University of Utah, qualified as a teacher, and taught grade school to support

her family until her own death half a century later.

The immediate trauma of losing a parent was somewhat mitigated by the age of the children; Dale at five was the oldest, Robert, the youngest, was barely six months old. In the Morgan family life without father was simply the way of things, there was no separation anxiety or grieving as would be expected in older children. Despite the absence of a father, Dale's childhood was largely a normal one, but as the oldest child he assumed the role of caretaker of his younger siblings during much of their early lives.<sup>1</sup>

If Morgan was spared the pain of one watershed event because of his youth, that same youthfulness was cruelly compromised ten years later by another watershed event, perhaps the major physical, emotional, and social turning point of his life. Morgan contracted spinal meningitis in the summer of 1929 just before beginning high school. For several weeks he hovered near death, then began a slow recovery that kept him out of school at home for a full year. As he recovered, his audible world changed. He began to hear whistles, bells, and howls which became louder and more frequent and then which stopped abruptly. The recovery was only a partial one; the disease that had nearly killed him left a bitter mark—he was completely deaf. From that point until his death from cancer in 1972 Dale Morgan was forced into a silent world.

The disease had come inopportunately at the onset of puberty and the loss of his hearing savaged Morgan's social development. In later years he recognized to his cousin and best friend Jerry Bleak the extent to which his world shattered: "I felt guilty and inferior and betrayed by my life in a great many ways. The loss of my hearing at a stroke cut me off from the leadership in my school and my neighborhood which I had previously experienced; I shrank from the conspicuity of my disability; I could not or would not establish myself socially."<sup>2</sup> As a youth he had to readjust entirely to a life which was alien but wholly inescapable. Emily did not want her son to stagnate and arranged for Dale to transfer from South High to West High, where a lip reading class was taught. His high school years were difficult, but being a good student he maintained high marks.

Well into his late teens Morgan's mother, Emily, insisted that Dale devote part of each day learning to lip read. Sister Ruth and brothers Jim and Bob were assessed blocks of time to work with Dale on textbook drills. Youngest brother Robert remembered sitting on opposite ends of the porch swing through the summer, endlessly saying words and drilling Dale on the facial shapes and motions of speech that he could not

---

1. Interview with Robert D. Morgan, 25 Apr. 1994, transcript in my possession.

2. Dale L. Morgan to Jerry Bleak, 5 Oct. 1938, Jerry Bleak Correspondence, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City; hereafter Bleak Letters.

now hear. Unable to grasp the visual intricacies of spoken sound, he often stormed off in frustration. "The lip reader goes 'by guess and by God,'" he wrote later, "and must try to gather what is meant by the context: whether, in a given case, the speaker is talking, say, about a pad, pat, pan, bad, bat, ban, mad, mat, man, pant, or band."<sup>3</sup> An inborn drive for accuracy made lipreading a welter of maddening supposition. Despite his native intelligence and the effort devoted to the drills, Morgan was never able to master lip reading for people much beyond his immediate family and closest friends. For the rest of his life comprehension of face-to-face communication depended largely on the context of the topic, an incredibly quick mind, the rudiments of lip reading, and words sketched with a finger in the palm of a hand or jotted quickly onto a pad.<sup>4</sup>

Deafness carries its own physical weight. The quality of his speech deteriorated. His deafness coming at the onset of puberty as it did, his voice changed, causing no end of embarrassment as he was unaware of the change or how to correct his vocal timbre. "Stated quite simply," he later wrote, "I had no mental background for a reliable method of expressiveness within the lower registers." "The throat-strain attendant on high tones served to inform me that my voice was out of step, I naturally attempted to restrain my voice; a degree of monotone has quite inevitably followed in my speech."<sup>5</sup> In addition, because he had no aural benchmark against which to compare his vocal expression to being monotonic, Dale's voice became rather loud. Acquaintances often discreetly waved a hand to communicate that he needed to modify the volume. Generally, reticence caused him to be shy about his vocal quality, and eventually he chose not to speak except among family and close friends. At school and with casual acquaintances he would often communicate back and forth in longhand only.

The nine years between beginning college in 1933 and leaving Utah for Washington, D.C., in 1942 were important years that set direction to the rest of his life. Psychologically as well as physically handicapped, Morgan was, in 1933, turning nineteen, a year older than his graduating high school classmates. The secure daily routine of school at West High was behind him and he had been five years without sound. Physically he was a different person than he had been even three years earlier. He was a gangly adolescent. He had grown fairly tall (just under six feet), but the robust youth that had reveled with his cousins and neighbors in tennis and impromptu neighborhood track meets was now thin to the point of

---

3. "To Those With Ears," Apr. or May 1937, Dale L. Morgan Papers, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California; microfilm at Special Collections, Marriott Library, reel 54, frames 674-96; hereafter cited as Morgan Papers, [reel]:[frames].

4. Robert Morgan interview, 25 Apr. 1994, in my possession.

5. "To Those with Ears."

being wan. Still, his strength had largely returned and he was no longer required to rest regularly. The wavy hair still piled atop his head but now presided over a pair of ears that were rather large and a thin face. Due to severe adolescent acne that carried into adulthood, Morgan's face remained pitted to the end of his life.

When Dale graduated from high school in the late spring of 1933, he was thrown forcibly with thousands of other graduates into the stark world of the Great Depression. It was an anguishing prospect and one that terrified the young man. Without direction—complicated by his loss of hearing—he felt naked and unprepared to cope with the societal demands placed on a graduate. His ambivalence was complicated by what he felt was social ineptitude, particularly with girls. He acutely felt his failure to attend school dances and to date. His biology unfulfilled and somewhat repressed by his social reticence, women and sexuality became a deliciously introspective topic in his silent world, but one that also caused him considerable moral self-castigation for that attention.<sup>6</sup>

Cousin Jerry (T. Gerald Bleak), a year older and two grades ahead of Dale, had taken a year of post-graduate studies at West High before joining the Civilian Conservation Corps.<sup>7</sup> With Jerry detailed to a work camp in southern Utah, Dale was deprived of his boon companion and of the one member of the Bleak/Holmes/Morgan cousin-pairings who had been his nearest friend. Jerry had taught Dale chess the year before his meningitis infection, but Morgan's gift for deductive logic quickly outstripped the older boy and pushed him to compete with ever more skillful players. Jerry's absence and his own completion of high school left Morgan with a surplus of unstructured time through the summer of 1933.

Having graduated from high school, with little to do that summer and no chance of participating in any of the relief work beginning under Franklin Roosevelt's first administration, Morgan threw himself into reading. Confiding to Jerry in southern Utah, he outlined one week's literary diet as seven to nine Western novels, as many novelettes in half a dozen magazines, plus whatever short fiction might be sandwiched between the magazine covers.<sup>8</sup> The *Argosy*, a weekly fiction magazine, was a perennial favorite shared by both boys, and Dale kept Jerry closely apprised of its contents.

Morgan's voracious and omnivorous reading was perfectly suited to his handicap. It was at this period particularly that he began to stretch his capacity for concentration and his innate gift for comprehension and recall. It was also probably now that he began to accelerate the reading

---

6. Morgan to Bleak.

7. This unusual situation was a response to the high unemployment of the Depression. It reduced the number of young unemployed by keeping them in school.

8. Morgan to Jerry Bleak, 25 July 1933, Bleak Letters.

speed that would in later life allow him to devour books at a rate of about two to three seconds per page.<sup>9</sup> Morgan also discovered chess played by mail so that he could play Jerry in addition to the half-dozen friends he played weekly in person.<sup>10</sup>

Still, reading and chess provided escapes from the world around him, not substitutes for it. Morgan harbored no concrete plans for his future and was understandably uneasy about his occupational prospects being deaf in a depression economy. Due to his scholastic record and his handicap, Morgan qualified for a probationary scholarship to the University of Utah given by the Utah State Rehabilitation Department.<sup>11</sup> This award was supplemented with a \$6.00 monthly stipend from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration's student aid program. The latter award was "to pay students for doing socially desirable work, such as clerical, library and research work."<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately no record survives that records his assignment. Nonetheless, Morgan began a freshman's load of classes in the fall of 1933 as soon as possible after his high school graduation.

Throughout his collegiate career Dale lived at home on Hollywood Avenue, commuting to the university by streetcar and on foot. The first two years of school were a terrific challenge for him. He was more conscious than ever of his handicap, and because he seemed unable to master lip reading, he was unable to maintain the exemplary grades of his high school days. Morgan was overwhelmed, but not undone. The collegiate lecture system made his lack of hearing a major problem. "As far as the lecturing itself went, I gathered much of the meat of the courses by a liberal helping of myself to the notes of right- and left-hand neighbors, . . . and by attending to such comprehensible blackboard demonstrations as developed." His method was not without drawbacks, however. "There was [a] memorable class," he wrote once, "where my only neighbor, a Japanese student, wrote his notes in a combination of English, shorthand, and Japanese, but by and large, with some intensive application to the class texts, I fared well enough."<sup>13</sup>

Like any student Morgan was required to take scientific classes, but despite his youthful interest in chemistry, they did not hold the fascination for him that the humanities did. As he continued through school, he gravitated toward three areas of study that allowed him to study and perform as an individual with total hearing loss: English (specifically

---

9. James S. Morgan, personal communication, 25 Apr. 1992.

10. Morgan to Bleak, 25 July 1933.

11. Morgan to Jerry Bleak, 6 Oct. 1937, Bleak Letters.

12. Federal Emergency Relief Administration 1934-35, 4, Accn. 17, 72:6, University of Utah Archives.

13. "To Those With Ears."

writing), psychology, and art. They in turn shaped his perception of himself and provided important footings for his opinion of Mormonism and his relationship to it. As disciplines both art and writing had the feature of being self-generative, psychology classes demanded pedagogical (and for Morgan, introspective) study. In these three areas learning would not be compromised by his handicap.

Morgan possessed some natural talent for drawing and layout. His posters in high school had regularly won student awards. Art classes at the U offered him a formal opportunity to train his eye and hand, but more personally important, they gave him an opportunity to draw from life. "Drawing," for Morgan, was life drawing, not still life or landscape. Life drawing became, until he left Salt Lake City in 1942, one of his favorite pastimes and apparently came to provide a modicum of vicarious satisfaction for the human intimacy he felt he lacked.<sup>14</sup>

Classes in psychology and sociology affected him deeply. Psychology provided an opportunity to analyze himself and his drives and to come to terms at least scientifically and quite matter-of-factly with what he had missed or not understood when developing as an adolescent. Though he probably no longer felt himself to be a believer in Mormonism, it was by immersing himself in reading sexual and Freudian developmental psychology that he was able to distance himself from his family's and culture's mores. An introspective psychological critique of himself soon turned outward to hold at arm's length the Utah/Mormon culture and people of which he was emotionally still very much a part.

However much art pleased Dale and psychology stimulated him, it was in writing that he finally found not only an outlet for his creativity but some of the expressive freedom for which, being a deaf adult, he longed. "It's one of the more unfortunate disabilities of my inability to hear that it has limited me in my adult conversations with people," he once wrote to an aunt. "To talk with people very intimately or at very great length involves a certain amount of labor, both for me and for the person I'm talking to."<sup>15</sup> Possessed of a quick mind, he never quite overcame the need for that labor and never did become comfortable speaking conversationally with those with whom he was not well acquainted.<sup>16</sup>

His reading habits as a young adult provided a solid foundation in good writing. College provided both a workshop and an outlet for his first serious literary work. In 1935 Morgan was accepted as a staff writer

14. Undated diary entry, Morgan Papers, 25:1687.

15. Interview with James S. and Mary Beth Morgan, 25 Apr. 1991, transcript in my possession.

16. Despite his lengthy contacts with Morgan, Talisman Press publisher Robert Greenwood was unaware that Dale could speak until they met to discuss the third book to be released for the press. Personal communication, Apr. 1990.

on the university's student newspaper the *Chronicle*, where he was introduced to and worked under the tutelage of advisor Wallace Stegner. Working there he wrote on virtually everything at the university, occasionally under a byline. Journalistic work, however, was more a diversion and training ground for his interest in fiction. In his four years at the university Morgan published eight times in the quarterly student literary magazine, *The University Pen*. Four submissions were short critical essays on the collegiate experience, four were fiction.<sup>17</sup> For three years, until he joined the Federal Writers' Project in 1938, Morgan constantly wrote and revised short stories and produced outlines and plot sketches for longer works.<sup>18</sup>

Morgan's period of serious fictional writing began in 1935 and concluded with an uncompleted autobiographical novel in late 1939. Guided by his study in psychology, in the midst of his intellectual coming of age, Morgan wrote and submitted to the *Salt Lake Tribune* a short story called "The Atheist," which was published on 12 May 1935 and won the *Tribune's* free-lance award for short fiction. Carefully constructed in the language of the eight-year-old character, a boy discovers through a juvenile test that "there is no God!" This small success encouraged Morgan to pursue writing actively. Two years after "Atheist," in "The Business Man," another award-winning short story, he spills out the frustration of a handicapped person (blind, in this case) seeking to be considered as an equal in society. "Twenty-nine Dollars," "Eve," "For the Sun Will Be Always Bright," and surviving drafts of plots and story outlines hint at the weight that sexual awareness played in his own coping with social mores and adjustment in society. Fiction provided a path to discuss himself and personal concerns that he felt uncomfortable expressing to his Latter-day Saint mother and family; consequently Morgan's fiction is strongly autobiographical. In fiction he could pour onto the page the frustration and social ambivalence he felt uncomfortable expressing—especially to his active LDS family.

Some of Morgan's most telling documents at this time are several surviving "discussions" about writing and his concept of self that survive in his papers. "Originality and genuineness," he wrote in one discussion, apparently with an English professor, "are liberated only within narrow limits; the strange mixture of emotion and intellect which make up my character is forcibly subdued . . . [and is revealed] only [as] a shadow of the real self, which would emerge if I were liberated from all social, intel-

---

17. See my *Eloquence from a Silent World: A Bibliography of the Published Writings of Dale L. Morgan* (Salt Lake City: Caramon Press, 1990), nos. 80-82, 84, 86, 88-90; most are named below.

18. A few of these are scattered in his papers. See Morgan Papers, reels 54 and 55.

lectual and moral restraints."<sup>19</sup> It is evident that Morgan is drinking in some of the radical individuality—and hubris—that seems to characterize those seeking to understand themselves. The restraint he felt was not specifically Mormonism, but unnamed (perhaps unknown) forces of social mores and self-controls. His fiction, particularly the unpublished drafts, reveal the ambivalence of someone who wants to seek absolute freedom but yearns for the security of predictable and comfortable social institutions. What liberation reading had brought to pre-collegiate Dale Morgan, art, psychology, and writing became for the student.

As a result of his first publication in the *Pen*, Morgan attended late in the 1934 school year a meeting of Sigma Nu, an honorary literary club at the university. Here he met Jarvis Thurston, an Ogden expatriate a year ahead of him in school. Thurston became a good friend but graduated the following year and accepted a position teaching mathematics at Ogden Junior High School.<sup>20</sup>

During the time Morgan and Thurston were in school, Morgan was introduced to Thurston's fiancée Madeline Reeder, who was several years older than either Morgan or her fiancé. She and Thurston had met while she was working at the Ogden Public Library. While Jarvis was in classes, she occasionally travelled to Salt Lake City to visit at the U. She and Thurston married shortly after he graduated in 1935. At the time she was expecting to have a novel published by Alfred A. Knopf and had literary contacts to Utah expatriate and *American Mercury* editor Bernard DeVoto. Morgan was captivated. "Honest," he wrote to Jerry, "she is 'more fun than a picnic', because she has a brain like a razor, very penetrating wit, and a remarkable literary background." Morgan's hunger for literary success elevated Madeline Thurston and her writing experience to a high pedestal. Discussions of literary criticism resulted in soul-baring analysis for the two writers that drew them closely together.<sup>21</sup> For Madeline the relationship with this younger man may have been limited to intellectual intimacy, for Morgan it was one of near-captive devotion. The summer that Dale graduated from the U, he and an unidentified "friend" had a long, intense discussion about human sexuality, and Dale himself acknowledged the effect that this exchange had on him.<sup>22</sup> It seems to have provided for Morgan the catharsis of sexual identity that had been the focus of his collegiate fiction. As he had few intimates, that friend was most likely Madeline Thurston.

By the time Morgan graduated from the University of Utah in 1937, studying psychology had served its purpose, awakening a critical vein of

19. Morgan Papers, 55:11f.

20. Jarvis Thurston interview, 16 June 1994, 2-4, in my possession.

21. Morgan to Jerry Bleak, 16 July 1937, Bleak Letters.

22. Morgan to Bleak, 5 Oct. 1938.



thought that was severing emotional ties to Mormon culture; intellectual and spiritual ties had dissolved years earlier. Though he continued to draw recreationally for five more years, the studio was also largely left behind. After graduating with a B.A. and an art emphasis that June, Morgan was left with writing. As he had four years before, he faced the prospect of being unemployed. This time, however, he was becoming reconciled to the concept of human sexuality and to his deafness, emotionally able face the situation with increased confidence.

The summer and fall of 1937 were fruitless for Morgan's job search. Almost immediately upon graduating, twenty-three-year-old Dale Morgan approached the *Salt Lake Tribune's* Literature and Art Department with a suggestion that he be hired to write a daily book review. In the midst of the slow summer season the section editor did not feel that a column was warranted but offered Morgan the opportunity to write a regular Sunday review.<sup>23</sup> He accepted the offer and wrote periodic book reviews for the paper until 1939. In August Dale went to work on a pair of sample ad campaigns for two of the best customers of Gillham's Advertising, Salt Lake's largest advertising business. Initially he was encouraged by their interest and waited anxiously to hear from them. It was not until October that he learned from an acquaintance who worked for Gillham's that his appointment was virtually certain until a staid vice president concluded not to interview him because of his handicap. Through the rest of the summer and fall of 1937 Morgan played chess, read, worked around the Hollywood Avenue house, and wrote to Salt Lake City's department stores and advertising companies, unsuccessfully seeking work on advertising and art staffs. "I have about given up the idea of a local journalistic career for the present," he decided.<sup>24</sup> Near the first of October the State Rehabilitation Department wrote offering to help him in his job search. He was reluctant, preferring to have choice in employment rather than being placed.

As fall approached, Dale travelled to Ogden and stayed with the Thurstons for two weeks through mid-October, determined to begin a novel: "an examination of the Utah generation now coming of age—the generation for whom the frontier no longer exists in the land but in the minds of men." The theme was a logical extension of the novel Madeline Thurston had completed and was revising,<sup>25</sup> suggesting how closely he identified with the older woman. While in Ogden he played an exhibition chess match against the entire club simultaneously, winning ten and

---

23. Morgan to Jerry Bleak, 21 June, 23 May, 16 July 1937, Bleak Letters. A list of the thirty-three reviews appears in *Eloquence*, n. 158-n.189.

24. Morgan to Bleak, 6 Oct. 1937.

25. Thurston interview.

drawing one of fourteen boards.<sup>26</sup>

After returning from Ogden Morgan essentially dropped job hunting through the holiday season to concentrate on personal study and writing. Through January 1938 he was putting four hours daily into studying advertising until he set it aside, consumed by a flash of literary inspiration. "I am in the very middle of the most fertile period I have experienced in over two years of writing," he confessed to Jerry serving an LDS mission in Samoa. "I begrudge almost every minute stolen from that writing, whether to eat, sleep, read, play chess, bathe, or keep up with my correspondence." He wrote feverishly, and before May had composed what he felt was his best short fiction and submitted several short pieces to magazines.<sup>27</sup> From the turn of the New Year until July Morgan alternated between writing his Utah novel and short fiction at home in Salt Lake City and assisting Madeline Thurston to rewrite her novel at her home in Ogden.

In late July 1938 Morgan travelled to Ogden on one of his periodic trips, intending to accompany the Thurstons on a ten-day vacation to Yellowstone. A few days before he arrived, Jarvis Thurston had been approached by Maurice L. Howe of the Historical Records Survey about working on a new federal relief project in the state. The work involved locating, collecting, and transcribing nineteenth-century diaries and autobiographies and conducting oral histories with Utah's oldest surviving emigrants. Thurston declined the offer in favor of continuing his teaching contract in the Ogden schools but suggested Morgan and Radcliffe Squires as alternates. Before they left, Thurston directed Morgan to the WPA office. Morgan was tentatively hired on the strength of that recommendation despite the fact that he was non-certified (was not on federal relief), pending interviews with Ogden office superintendent Hugh O'Neil, general editor and state Writers' Project director Maurice L. Howe, and approval by the state WPA board.

Morgan and the Thurstons cut their Yellowstone trip to four days and returned in time for Morgan to meet with Howe and receive final clearance from the state WPA board. He was cleared and began a 90-hour work month as "historian" in the Ogden office on 10 August 1938. "My work is somewhat diverse in character," he explained to Jerry, "but I will handle all the publicity for the Survey in Utah, do general rewriting and editing work on the inventories of all the county records, which the Survey has gathered and is publishing, and in general make myself useful."<sup>28</sup>

26. Morgan to Bleak, 6 Oct., 7, 30 Nov. 1937, Bleak Letters.

27. Morgan to Jerry Bleak, 28 Jan., 25 Feb. 1938, Bleak Letters. Some of the plots written at this period survived in his papers. See Morgan Papers, 55:233f.

28. Morgan to Jerry Bleak, 13 Aug. 1938, Bleak Letters; Thurston interview.

More than anything, being employed crystallized in Morgan a change in his social outlook and self-awareness that had begun shortly before, instilling in its catharsis a real vitality. His lack of employment for the prior year had depressed him; life at home confined him (he was concerned that writing late into the night would disturb the family with his typewriter clacking and felt literarily hampered). Within a month after moving to Ogden he wrote a "most unexpected and strange letter" to his mother explaining to her his need for the emotional independence and opportunity for self-proving that this job provided.<sup>29</sup> Emily, a concerned and protective mother, was watching her beloved, handicapped son strike out on his own. Dale, genuinely solituous of his mother's feelings, was trying to do so gently.

In May 1939 his monthly letter to Jerry Bleak assumed a more serious aspect and revealed deeper issues that he was not comfortable expressing to his immediate family. "I have written you letters which had hardly more of me than of the man in the moon in them—they could have been written by any of six thousand people on this earth—and your letters have been much of the same sort. . . . I have been possessed, up to now, with a thousand utterly trivial things. I am now undergoing a wholesale revision of all my beliefs and habits and methods of living, . . ."<sup>30</sup> This "revision" was not broadcast beyond his most intimate acquaintances. "There are no more than about 4 more persons to whom I am saying this—and you are the only one among my relatives to whom I so express myself." In coming months he continued to plead with Jerry to approach their relationship seriously and not merely as a superficial friendship. "I am simply driven now by a desire to establish my life on a more vital basis," he explained.<sup>31</sup>

Part of that drive was poured into a new novel. The main character was Morgan himself, thinly disguised as Ed Garnett, a boy deafened at fourteen by meningitis. Summoning all of his energy and talent for writing and expression, the lonely, silent frustration of ten years spilled onto page after page of self-revelation. For a full year Morgan wrote of the confused disbelief over losing his hearing and of the several attempts to explain and then cure the problem, the agony of being thrust beyond society, the inability to understand or meaningfully communicate the biology of puberty, the fascination and the repulsion that sexuality held, the challenge of school, and all the hard, or sharp, or weak, or fearful things with which experience could hurt or confuse him. He proceeded with the work as far as a cleanly-typed draft manuscript edited from his first (and possibly second) draft. When he shelved the incomplete manuscript to

29. Morgan to Emily Morgan, 2 Sept. 1938, Morgan Papers, 21:12.

30. Morgan to Jerry Bleak, 22 May 1938, Bleak Letters.

31. Morgan to Bleak, 13 Aug. 1938.

concentrate on historical writing shortly after the turn of 1940, much of the pain had apparently dissipated, for he never returned to the manuscript.<sup>32</sup>

The survey wasted no time putting Morgan to work. In July 1938, just as he was hired, the federal offices directed that the two- to three-page historical sketches that had been included with county records inventories should be expanded into pieces of greater historical value. Between July and October 1938 Dale completed a finished draft of the Beaver County history and compiled the research for Tooele. The Beaver County history was the first of Utah's county histories to be completed and stood as a benchmark for all other histories produced in the state, but the inventory of county records remained incomplete and the volume was never published. Before the end of the year Dale was slated to complete draft histories for Washington and Utah counties, too. The research for this historical writing threw him into contact with the state's nineteenth-century diaries and autobiographies being transcribed by the Writers' Project, in addition to what primary and secondary history of the state and the Mormons had been written. With the latter he was not impressed. "Practically nothing really worthwhile touching upon Utah and Mormonism, what they have been, and what they have become, is worth one single damn, and that goes not only for non-Mormon writing but for Mormon writing," he wrote to Jerry. "There is a golden opportunity for some gifted writer to produce the first extensive, penetrating work on the whole amazing phenomena of Utah, the West, and the Mormon relation to itself and both."<sup>33</sup> Morgan probably did not realize at the time he wrote this just how prophetic his words were, nor the wrenching effect they would have on his life in little more than a decade.

Dale's capacity for concentration and innate attention to detail quickly distinguished him as a careful researcher and good writer. Within three months of being hired Morgan and bibliographer Leonard Hart were established as the survey's "historical department," answering directly to the state HRS supervisor. By this time Morgan was just finishing a 2,500-word introduction for a republication of Utah's first book of laws, the *Ordinances of the State of Deseret*, while the drafts of his county histories were being reviewed for federal approval.<sup>34</sup> Six months later in March 1939, barely nine months from the date he began work, he wrote home to tell his mother of his impending appointment to the general editorship of the Utah HRS.<sup>35</sup>

---

32. The manuscript (unidentified in the papers) is divided between Morgan Papers' reels 54 and 55.

33. Morgan to Bleak, 5 Oct. 1938.

34. Morgan to Jerry Bleak, 31 Nov. [Dec.] 1938, Bleak Letters.

35. Morgan to Emily Morgan, Morgan Papers, 21:26.

Not all in his life was going so evenly. In the same letter to Emily Morgan, Dale related to her a confrontation with a local gossip-monger over rumors she had been spreading about his relationship to the Thurstons. In truth, Morgan and the Thurstons spent a good deal of time together. Dale would play chess with Jarvis and "discuss" literature with Madeline at the same time. Quickly moving a chess piece, he would turn to Madeline and would ask a question of some sort, Thurston remembered, speaking of these multi-faceted sessions, "then you would have to reply by writing it all down. And these questions were [questions] like: 'what do you think of Flaubert's *Madam Bovary*' or something; then you'd have to write four pages in order to explain about it." With the two busy at their respective tasks, Morgan would read a book.<sup>36</sup>

Part of the gossip was grounded in fact. Jarvis and Madeline Thurston's marriage seemed to be deteriorating and she began shifting her attention elsewhere. Dale was quite eager to pick up for her what pieces there may have been, but Madeline would not have it. Morgan's mother Emily disliked Madeline intensely, but Dale's equally intense loyalty to his friends defended the older woman from ridicule, even from his own mother.<sup>37</sup> Despite this, Morgan was acutely conscious that Madeline did not accord him the same emotion that he held for her. "Came home to find a letter from Madeline," he wrote once in an undated diary entry from the period. "I was greatly disappointed; it was so chill and remote for all the surface warmth. Again I had the wretched feeling of being only of intellectual interest."<sup>38</sup> Events later would suggest that there was considerable truth to his despondent guess.

Despite the complication that the Thurstons represented to his life, Morgan liked them both and enjoyed his work. All of his letters to friends and family breathe energy and recount the incredible scope of his activity. Despite the promotion, he could not help but remember that the job was at best an indeterminate one, sure to end no later than with the project's conclusion. As spring 1939 broke, he decided to make another attempt in advertising. He immediately contacted Gillham's in Salt Lake City to see if they had softened. Again they were interested and again their interest cooled quickly, so Morgan turned his attention outside the state. Brushing up his advertising studies, he drafted some sample campaigns introducing himself to prospective employers and in July travelled with his family by car to Washington then down the coast to the San Francisco Bay Area. For two weeks he contacted potential employment prospects and received encouragement from many. None, however, were in a position to hire him. Morgan also approached the *San Francisco Chronicle*

36. Thurston interview.

37. Interview with Robert Morgan, 19 Mar. 1994, transcript in my possession.

38. Undated diary entry (likely Mar. 1939), Morgan Papers, 25:1687.

about an editorial position there and was put off until the fall. "If the sun began to shine' perhaps a couple of sample articles this fall [will] open the way," he wrote hopefully to Jerry.<sup>39</sup>

He returned to Utah mid-month, rather depressed, and found himself out of a job at the survey. Due to a federal employment rule, employees voluntarily absent from work over five days were subject to dismissal. A month before his trip Morgan had accepted a transfer from the Ogden office to Salt Lake City to be closer to the state's largest libraries. Administrative tangles between the WPA and the Salt Lake Re-employment Service were ironed out allowing him to be rehired, but he idled at home for nearly a month earning no salary, still intending to return to the coast in the fall.

Dale occupied this free time by beginning research on a book treating the early fur trade to be co-authored with Maurice Howe, former Utah director of the HRS and Federal Writers' Project now transferred to Washington, D.C. He also wrote feverishly on the autobiographical novel, telling Jerry that a draft would be hopefully ready by the time he returned from Samoa in October.<sup>40</sup> Once back on the WPA staff, Dale completed the Daggett County historical sketch in time for the county inventory to be published in August and commenced work on a historical sketch of Weber County.<sup>41</sup>

Morgan devoted some of his free time to investigating advertising but before the end of the year had pretty much abandoned the idea of advertising as a career and did not return to California. Instead, he wrote in October a letter to Farrar & Rinehart, publisher of the Rivers of America Series. The inquiry became a hinge pin around which his entire future turned: "I have been mulling over in my mind a book which, it appears to me, would fit admirably into your Rivers of America Series. Announcement of publication of your book on the Sacramento River has finally stirred me to this inquiry."<sup>42</sup> Farrar & Rinehart's "Rivers" series was successful and produced as late as 1972 some very competent history. In 1939 the series had fewer than half a dozen titles to its credit but had attracted critical acclaim. Morgan proposed (there was no manuscript at this point) a book on the Mary's or Humbolt River, a vital stretch of brackish water that sinks into the Nevada desert without reaching another river, marking an important stretch of the California Trail. He received no immediate answer and the next month wrote to the company asking for a decision, explaining that he was also working on a novel

---

39. Morgan to Jerry Bleak, 12 Aug. 1939, Bleak Letters.

40. Ibid.

41. *Inventory of the County Archives of Utah: No. 5 Daggett County (Manila)* (Ogden, UT: Historical Records Survey, 1939).

42. Morgan to Farrar & Rinehart, Morgan Papers, 3:310.

(most likely the semi-fictional autobiography) that might be completed under contract to another publisher. Farrar & Rinehart accepted the Humbolt proposal almost at once, and at the close of the year Morgan returned a signed contract.<sup>43</sup>

For Dale, the year that began with such a bright outlook (1940) also held an important and unpleasant personal rift that affected his later life. Dale asked his mother if she could put up Madeline for a couple of nights and Emily did so grudgingly. Jarvis and Madeline Thurston's marriage had frayed seriously. Perhaps unknown to Dale, Madeline had formed an attachment to Thomas McQuown, a mutual friend who worked as a railway postal clerk. Morgan watched from the sidelines, perhaps unaware of the triangle that did not involve himself but unwilling to step in to see the relationship preserved in any case. In the spring of 1940 McQuown finally persuaded Madeline to leave Jarvis and establish residency in Nevada preliminary to a divorce.

Madeline left a brief note at home for her husband and without a hint of her destination or intent caught a train out of Salt Lake City. Thurston was thunderstruck but surmised the purpose. He rightly supposed that Dale would know of her whereabouts and went to his apartment. Madeline and Dale had apparently had a discussion before she left, but perhaps in a thin hope that he could talk Madeline into marrying him once the divorce was completed, Morgan was unwilling to tell his chess partner and friend anything. Jarvis angrily left Dale's apartment, and the two never saw each other again.

Thurston eventually traced Madeline to Las Vegas and talked her out of pursuing the legal action, but at Tom McQuown's continued prompting she completed the divorce proceedings. Dale probably never understood that he was not of romantic interest to Madeline. In March he had written a pleading letter seeking the emotional intimacy that leads to affection. Madeline folded it and on the back over Morgan's signature doodled dozens of times the name of Tom McQuown, whom she would pass over Morgan to marry in late 1940.<sup>44</sup>

Survey work for Dale in 1940 was a continuous round of manuscripts, proofreading, corrections, and galleys. For the next year or two chess and fiction were relegated to back seats as he pursued historical writing and his personal life, though he still found time for occasional chess games and for dropping in to life-drawing studios at the commu-

---

43. Morgan to Farrar & Rinehart, 18 Nov. 1939; Morgan to Stanley M. Rinehart, Jr., Morgan Papers, 6:473.

44. Thurston interview; Jarvis Thurston to Richard Saunders, 19 July 1994, in my possession; Morgan to Madeline Thurston, 14 Mar. 1940, Madeline McQuown Papers, Special Collections, Marriott Library.

nity arts center.<sup>45</sup> Due to the new Farrar & Rinehart contract for *Humbolt* he shelved the autobiography after the turn of the year and determined to clean up his writing projects in progress at work. By February 1941 he was putting a finish to the manuscript for *The State of Deseret*, which had swallowed up his introduction to *Ordinances of the State of Deseret*; was writing the histories of Carbon and Utah counties; had begun work on an Ogden municipal history; and was madly compiling and rewriting what became *Utah: A Guide to the State*. In the evenings and on weekends he worked on *Humbolt* research.

Though he was respected for producing good historical work, *The State of Deseret* was his first truly path-breaking history, the first history of the Mormons' provisional government organized and functioning independently in Great Salt Lake City before territorial status was granted to Utah in 1850. The piece had been conceived merely as an introduction to a mimeographed reprinting of *Ordinances of the State of Deseret*, the printed original of which existed in barely half a dozen widely scattered copies. By the time it was completed, his history had grown substantially beyond the size of a typical "introduction." The Utah Project published it as a separate work—a "pre-print" (with the "Ordinances" relegated to an appendix) intended as an introduction to a never-completed inventory of the state archives. In October the entire work was also released as a monograph in three combined issues of the *Utah Historical Quarterly*.<sup>46</sup>

In August 1940 Dale had confessed to John Farrar of Farrar & Rinehart that he had not touched *Humbolt* yet due to the press of compiling the *Utah Guide*. By his own account Morgan had devoted much of the summer to "40,000 words to the Utah guide, including the 20,000 word history of the state." He also completed editorial work for a new edition of *Origins of Utah Place Names*, from survey data sheets compiled and edited much of the first volume of the *Inventory of the Church Archives of Utah*, and completed histories for the Carbon County and Utah County inventories. He might also have added that within the past month he had taken over the Utah Writers' Project with responsibility not only for the history he was writing but also overall editorial responsibility for all work produced by the project. He continued to do press releases and project publicity. He promised Farrar to begin writing in November, over a year after his letter proposing the book. His burden was eased considerably by completing the history of Ogden and the historical sketch for the Uintah inventory in October and November respectively, by returning

45. Morgan to John Farrer, 3:315; undated diary entry, 25:1687, both in Morgan Papers.

46. For a description of both, see *Eloquence*, n.8 and n.94. *The State of Deseret* was reprinted by Utah State University Press (Logan) in 1987, edited with an introduction by Charles S. Peterson.



the corrected galleys for the *Guide* in February 1941, and by finishing the Emery County historical sketch in March.<sup>47</sup>

Later that spring some polite official correspondence about WPA diary typescripts began a personal and literary friendship that would last to the end of his life. Juanita Brooks, a lay historian from southern Utah on retainer as a collector for the Huntington Library, was engrossed with locating and transcribing primary sources from the southern outposts of Mormon settlement. Turning northward she inquired about an exchange of historical sources. Morgan gladly complied and gratefully added her typescripts to the growing corpus of transcribed primary sources collected by his staff. When *Utah: A Guide to the State* was released in mid-1941, Brooks's praise was warm; Morgan acknowledged her contribution to preserving historical sources and literary attainments. Within a few months they had dropped formalities and operated on a first-name basis. Morgan contributed greatly to Brooks's development as a writer. "Juanita," wrote her biographer, "accepted Morgan as her mentor in scholarly and literary matters . . . His technical advice would profoundly influence the form and content of her major writings."<sup>48</sup> From her Morgan gained not only a disciple but also a connection to what he felt was Mormonism's last pioneer blood. Their common ground was not Utah but Mormonism, though the pair found themselves on opposite sides when it came to spiritual belief.

As he worked on historical endeavors, Morgan's remaining ties to Latter-day Saint culture dissolved. After high school it was evident to those outside the family that he did not consider himself a believer in the LDS church but at the same time had not left it.<sup>49</sup> That position changed with his education at the University of Utah and personal readings in psychoanalysis, which had served to reconcile Mormon faith structures to simple psychological dependence and group sociology. Primarily, however, Morgan was critical of the casual hypocrisy that he felt characterized the lives of many Latter-day Saints and Utahns. Citing several examples and analyzing them for a former chess partner Richards Durham, abroad on an LDS mission, he commented: "I have never known, save only now in you, a person I could respect who held to the Mormon beliefs." To Juanita Brooks he later stated: "if I have a religion, it is a belief in what I call 'the decency of human relationships.' I live life as I see it from day to day . . . and in my way I think I am a better Mormon than those who go to church on Sunday and pay their tithing." Dale's respect

---

47. Morgan to Farrar & Rinehart, 10 Aug. 1940; Morgan to Bernard DeVoto, 2:1417, both in Morgan Papers.

48. Levi S. Peterson, *Juanita Brooks: Mormon Woman Historian* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 120.

49. Interview with Samuel Holmes, 6 Mar. 1995, typescript in my possession.

for a religious believer seemed to be based on an appreciation of critical, thoughtful belief. Morgan did not care for doctrine and pointedly did not reject Mormon beliefs, but rather he was critical of the thoughtless disregard that individuals paid to their own religious participation and the casualness with which Latter-day Saint ethical strictures were held in the social culture. Though he dismissed the doctrines of his family's faith as an unbeliever, he did not reject them as an apostate. Instead he seemed to place himself within the larger context of Mormonism that encompassed all groups claiming a heritage from the following of Joseph Smith. Responding pointedly to criticism from RLDS historian S. A. Burgess, Morgan wrote that he "[did] not subscribe to the doctrinal contentions of any of the several Mormon churches." He continued to be intrigued by the Latter-day Saints. Mormonism for Dale Morgan remained alive and vital, but only as a cultural vitality, not as a faith.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the as-yet-unmet commitment to Farrar & Rinehart for the *Humbolt* manuscript, at the close of 1941 Morgan had wrapped up a host of smaller projects and needed a new project for official writing at work. The result was a history of Provo, Utah, *Provo: Pioneer Mormon City*, done in the WPA guidebook style but with a substantial history of the area and with geographical and community descriptions as well. Little is known of the history of this book as there are no surviving office records, and Morgan barely mentions it in correspondence. That the book is largely his work is evident from the style of the writing. The introduction and lion's share of the 150-page history is certainly his. The volume was published in 1942 by Binsfords and Mort of Portland, Oregon, and represented his last work for the Utah Writers' Project.

Classification as 4-F by the local draft board in May 1941 insured that his work on *Humbolt* or for the HRS would not be interrupted by induction into the military. For a year and a half Morgan concentrated on producing a manuscript for *Humbolt* but took enough time to pursue shorter projects. He drafted a substantial article on the Deseret Alphabet that remains unpublished. The fur trade book begun with Maurice Howe apparently never progressed much past a cursory research stage, and the project was probably dropped shortly after Morgan received the contract to produce *Humbolt*.<sup>51</sup>

Morgan had accepted his initial position and worked for four years in the Historical Records Survey knowing that he would ultimately leave

---

50. Morgan to Richards Durham, 4 Dec. 1940, Morgan Papers, 2:1543; Morgan to Juanita Brooks, 12 Apr. 1942, Juanita Brooks Collection, Utah State Historical Society, cited in Peterson, *Juanita Brooks*, 125; Morgan to Maguerite Sinclair, 21 Dec. 1940, Morgan Papers, 6:328.

51. Morgan Papers, 25:1791; Morgan to Wallace Stegner, 28 Jan. 1942, both in Morgan Papers.

Utah.<sup>52</sup> It was merely a matter of timing. In 1938 he had been convinced that it would be best to pursue advertising; by spring 1942 he was turning toward historical writing as a profession. To meaningfully pursue that field he had to be near the greatest concentration of sources. He turned his attention east to the large research libraries, notably the Library of Congress and the National Archives. Maurice Howe, now in a federal position, offered him a place to stay in Washington, D.C., if he chose to look for work there. The *Guide* had gone to press and been released to critical acclaim, and with the exception of his Deseret Alphabet piece, all his other work was concluding. In June with the U.S. involved in a new world war Dale received a further draft-board classification as "Scientific and Specialized Personnel" that would allow him to work permanently in the private sector throughout the war.<sup>53</sup> After hosting Juanita Brooks on a tour of the city libraries and archives, Morgan began to wrap up his WPA activities and make plans to leave. Before the summer closed, he read and critiqued the galleys for Wallace Stegner's *Mormon Country* and worked furiously to complete a manuscript for the *Humbolt* while wrapping up what work remained at the Utah Writers' Project office. Practically his last act in Salt Lake City in October 1942 was to write to Farrar & Rinehart, notifying them that the manuscript for *The Humbolt: Highroad of the West* would be delivered to him from the typist the following morning and was ready for delivery "one year late, almost to the day."<sup>54</sup>

Dale had applied for a civil service position in Washington, D.C., in May but had not received word since. The war-time economy in the capital and his classification, however, almost guaranteed him a position of some sort, and it was with this slim certainty for the future that he boarded the east-bound train from Ogden in mid-October 1942 that would take him out of Utah. With the train lurching beneath him and alone with his thoughts, Dale installed his portable typewriter in the club car crowded with draftees and tapped out a poignant letter to his mother that was also very much a goodbye to Utah, Mormonism, and the insecurity of his youth.

I want to get outside the world I have lived in for so long, to get a new perspective on this world and upon myself. I want to see what the Mormon people, and Utah, look like from the vantage point of another culture in another environment. And I want to see how I fit into the world, where I belong in this world. I have always had the sense of dependencies: people have had to do things for me. Of course, that is true of everyone in life, but it means

---

52. Morgan to Emily Morgan, Morgan Papers, 21:12.

53. Morgan Papers, 25:1793.

54. Morgan to Wallace Stegner, 13 July 1942; Morgan to Stanley M. Rinehart, Jr., 27 Sept. 1942, both in Morgan Papers.

something to me to take hold of my life with both hands and do with it something affirmative. I think going away in this manner will give me a little better idea of where I fit into the world and what is to come of me hereafter. . . . For my own good, I want whatever come of my life to be of my choice, . . .<sup>55</sup>

It is perhaps gently appropriate that he was riding east on the Union Pacific's passenger train named the *Challenger*. He certainly made the most of his challenging opportunity. His free time in Washington while working in the Office of Price Administration proved a boon to his research, and much of his later work rested on footings gleaned from microfilm in the Library of Congress and National Archives during several years of lunch hours.

The Dale Morgan that rode eastward in October 1942 had intellectually matured but more importantly had reached a point of self-reconciliation. His sexual angst was conquered, he had found in writing a voice he felt he lacked as a youth and had proven to himself that he was capable of succeeding on the merits of his own skills. Unlike Fawn Brodie wrenching herself out of Mormonism, unlike Bernard DeVoto disgustingly dismissing Utah's parochialism, Morgan was not escaping from Utah, from the LDS church, or from Mormons—literally or figuratively. In moving east he was making for himself a calculated opportunity for self-development, one that dictated he find greener pastures. Through the next three decades he would return frequently to Salt Lake City's Hollywood Avenue, but only as a guest. Dale Morgan was riding off alone into the sunrise.

---

55. Morgan to Emily Morgan, Morgan Papers, 21:36.