second and third rows of black pieces that we realized that the seemingly identical puzzle pieces differed just enough so that the wrong piece kept the inner layers from fitting. Sometimes, the only way to judge whether the correct piece was in place was to see whether the puzzle bulged or remained flat.

Those seeking to understand Joseph through the lens of psychology must remember that, like the surgeon's knife, psychology's power to heal is also its power to destroy. The healing and insightful power of psychology often resides in the practitioner's ability to manage ambiguity, discern subtlety, educate his or her intuition, and excise his or her own arrogance. This is as true of the literary practice of psychology as it is of its practice in the therapy room. C. S. Lewis wrote "the kind of explanation which explains things away may give us something, though at a heavy cost. But you cannot go on 'explaining away' forever: you will find that you have explained explanation itself away. You cannot go on 'seeing through' things forever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it. . . . If you see through everything, then everything is transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To 'see through' all things is the same as not to see."[1] Morain and Anderson present new insight into some of Joseph's more puzzling behaviors. Nonetheless, the presentations are at times disconcerting in their confidence. When they reach the inner layers, does the puzzle bulge? And, more tellingly, do we see Joseph more clearly, or do we merely think that we see through him? And, seeing through him, do we fail to actually see him?

The Life of a Controversial Biographer

Fawn McKay Brodie: A Biographer's Life, by Newell G. Bringhurst (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 350 pp., $29.95.

Reviewed by M. Guy Bishop, Woods Cross, Utah.

WINNER OF THE 1999 "Best Biography Award" from the Mormon History Association, *Fawn McKay Brodie* measures up to the honor. A biographer commonly finds varied reasons for selecting his or her subject. Newell Bringhurst candidly discusses his motivations for researching and writing about Fawn McKay Brodie. "She was born of stalwart Mormon pioneer stock," he notes, "her ancestors having migrated to Utah during the mid-nineteenth century" (xiv). This background is quite similar to Bringhurst's own.

After questioning childhood beliefs during their adolescence, both Brodie and her biographer began drifting away from the faith while attending the University of Utah. Each experienced a sense of despair over what they saw as the seeming "contradictions" of Mormonism. For Brodie, doubt came from years of "meticulous research" into the career of Joseph Smith, which led her to conclude he was a "conscientious imposter"—in

1. C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: MacMillan, 1975), 91.

short, a fraud. For her biographer, the Mormon policy of denying LDS priesthood authority to black Americans proved a stumbling block. "Like Brodie, I developed a sense of 'moral outrage' at what I saw as the contradictions and tortured reasoning used to justify Mormonism's now-defunct policy of denying priesthood to blacks," Bringhurst writes (xiv).

As she assumed the path of the life writer, Brodie became influenced by the work of two noted psychologists—Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson. In fact, she proclaimed that her best-known biography, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History* (1974), was "similar in spirit to Freud's classic study of the psychosexuality of Leonardo Da.Vinci" (3). Similarly, Brodie praised the great psychobiographer Erik Erikson, the author of *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History*, as an "authentic genius" (4). Her professional training in psycho-history fused with her Mormon childhood and adolescence in Huntsville, Utah, to shape Brodie, the biographer.

In illuminating the links between Brodie's early life and her later career, Bringhurst is at his analytical best. Reared in a loving, encouraging Latter-day Saint home, Brodie judged her childhood to have been "idyllic" (7). Bringhurst skillfully weaves a narrative of youthful contentment, which came to be troubled by increasing religious disaffection. By the time she enrolled in college, Brodie's alienation from Mormonism had become full-blown.

Bringhurst convincingly shows that Brodie's growing break with Mormon beliefs may well have been linked to her maternal grandmother, Flora Brimhall, whose dislike of polygamy may have led to Brodie's own discontent (14). Hence her later attack on Joseph Smith and plural marriage in her first biography, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith* (1945). Students of Mormon history will have at least a passing familiarity with *No Man Knows My History*, the publication of which sparked an instant, usually negative, reaction in Mormon circles, leading eventually to Brodie's excommunication for apostasy in June 1946.

Biographies of Thaddeus Stevens, Richard Burton, Thomas Jefferson, and Richard Nixon followed, each as controversial as the last. *Thaddeus Stevens: Scourge of the South* (1959) tackled touchy questions of the reconstruction of the post-Civil War South. Following a "long, arduous process," the book enjoyed only "limited [commercial] success" (151). This disappointment was offset for the author by the praise heaped upon the book by reviewers. The *Washington Post*, for example, called it an "exceptional" study "filled with insight" (151).

After *Thaddeus Stevens* came *The Devil Drives: A Life of Sir Richard Burton*. This biography of the eccentric nineteenth-century English explorer was published in 1967. While researching and writing an introduction for a new edition of Burton's 1862 travel narrative, *The City of the Saints and Across the Rocky Mountains to California*, in 1964, Brodie quickly found herself "lost" in the man's life (165). For Brodie, this book proved a joy to write.

Her *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History* (1974) truly launched a firestorm of debate among American historians. In many ways the response was comparable (on a larger scale) to the furor among Mormons over *No Man Knows My History*. In the Jefferson biography, Brodie unflinchingly tackled the topic of Jefferson's sexual affair with his slave mistress, Sally Hemings, as she had earlier done with Joseph Smith and polygamy.

This ultimately became Brodie's best-known biography. It was, without a doubt, her most popular work, appearing on the *New York Times* best-seller list for thirteen weeks. Never intending to look at Jefferson's entire life, Brodie instead concentrated on the private man. To Brodie, the psychobiographer, Jefferson was "trapped by a fundamental dilemma": if he freed his slaves, in conformity with his conscience, then he feared he would lose his love, Hemings. According to Bringhurst, Brodie's frank treatment of this liaison was "especially timely given the state of American society during the late 1960s" (186).

While eminent Jefferson scholars "predictably" had a negative response to *Thomas Jefferson,* the "intense controversy" generated by the book brought strong sales, thus giving Brodie the final victory. *Thomas Jefferson* "sold eighty thousand copies during its first year of publication" (219). Interestingly, recent DNA testing of Hemings's descendants seems to vindicate Brodie's once-disputed assertions.

Her final biography *Richard Nixon: The Shaping of His Character* (1981) was, in many ways, Brodie's most difficult biography to write. Personally, she "despised" Nixon as an "aberration in the American democratic process" (225). In addition to the time-consuming Nixon project, Brodie was burdened by family and personal problems during the 1970s. In November 1977, Fawn's husband, Bernard, was diagnosed with cancer. His condition rapidly worsened, and in July 1978 he was hospitalized. While she admitted that it was "not an easy marriage," the couple drew strength from their differences (235). The day after Thanksgiving 1978, Bernard Brodie died. She found his loss a heavy weight to bear. "I didn't know how much I depended on him," she later confided to fellow Mormon historian Jan Shipps (237).

Two years later, as she was finishing her biography of Nixon, Fawn Brodie learned of her own cancer. Reflecting upon her condition, Brodie rather openly noted, "I have not been promised a long life, unless God is more compassionate than I have been in recent years led to believe" (250). As death neared, Brodie "found herself embroiled in one final controversy," according to Bringhurst. When her brother, Thomas McKay, visited her in the hospital, he was surprised when Fawn blurted out: "Oh, Tommy, Tommy, give me a blessing" (255). He blessed her.

Within days of this unforeseen request, Brodie felt, in the author's words, "the need to issue a public statement clarifying her motives." On 31 December 1980, less than two weeks before she died (10 January 1981), Brodie released a statement attempting to explain her behavior by the fact that her own father had given such blessings for comfort in her childhood home. She did not wish this act to be seen as asking "to be taken back into the [Mormon] church at that moment. I strictly repudiate [this] and would for all time" (255–56).

This biography has few flaws. One could possibly accuse the author of seeing himself a bit too much in Brodie's life. But even that might be an unfair accusation. It is clear that he wrestled, in a solid scholarly manner, with the reasons behind Brodie's plea for a priesthood blessing. He finally concludes that while Brodie "was clearly repelled by Mormonism per se," still she was "paradoxically attracted" to certain features of the faith. While Fawn McKay Brodie may have "hated" Mormonism, in the end "she couldn't shake it" (257).