

view. However, I am not necessarily part of the "we" of the narrative who interpret events a particular way. Reading *Sagwitch: Shoshone Chieftain, Mormon Elder*, I am aware that this is not the story as the Shoshone historians would tell it or even the story an ethnohistorian would reconstruct.¹ Granted, reconstructing histories from oral traditions when the preponderance of documentation presents a singular point of view can be tremendously challenging, and Christensen has made a valiant effort. In her land-

mark book, *The Legacy of Conquest*, Patricia Nelson Limerick notes: "Scholars have long been preoccupied with the image of 'the Indian' in the Euro-American mind; now, it is clear, others must make comparable studies of the image of 'the white man' in the Indian mind. In thinking about American Indian history, it has become essential to follow the policy of cautious street crossers: Remember to look both ways."² Christensen's book brings one aspect of Mormon history and Indian relations to the intersection.

Good Book about the Good Book

An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880, by Paul C. Gutjahr (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 256 pp., \$40.50

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PAUL GUTJAHR, Assistant Professor of English and American Studies at Indiana University, has written an elegant and engaging study of "The Good Book" in America. Readers of *An American Bible: A History of the Good Book in the United States, 1777-1880* enter the surprisingly fascinating world of America's print culture: a world filled with memorable anecdotes, colorful players, lofty motives, and shifting attitudes and practices. It is a world that Gutjahr argues has played a pivotal role in the evolution

of the Bible's influence upon American readers since the early 1700s. Indeed, Gutjahr asserts that the reasons for the diminishing role of the Bible in American print culture are found ironically in the very evolution of content and packaging of the Holy Scriptures (3).

In chapter one, "Production," Gutjahr relates the attempts of The American Bible Society to produce and distribute hundreds of thousands of Bibles in the United States. By making the Bible the most accessible written text in America, the society's Board of Managers hoped to ensure the religious and civil well-being of all citizens. However, Gutjahr concludes that the society's attempt to place a Bible in every home brought unintended results—a fragmentation of the American Bible market that eventually led to more than 1,700 editions by competing publishers.

In chapter two, "Packaging," Gut-

1. For an example of this kind of history, see Loretta Fowler's *Arapahoe Politics, 1851-1978* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982).

2. Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: Norton, 1987), 181.

jahr turns his attention to the binding, exterior decoration, color, size, and annotations of the Bible. Chapter two also contains 25 illustrations which support Gutjahr's assertion that in their attempt to clarify meaning and add insights into the biblical text, the publishers of the Bible simultaneously reinforced nineteenth-century cultural attitudes regarding gender, home, and of course the role of "The Good Book" itself.

As more and more editions of the Bible appeared, clerics, scholars, and publishers became concerned with the "purity" and "reliability" of the sacred text. In chapter three, "Purity," Gutjahr discusses the tension publishers felt as each attempted to produce a Bible that retained the sacred voice readers expected to find and yet was also free of typographical errors, inconsistencies, and ambiguities (such as the definition of "baptism"). He describes as well how Biblical translations were as subject to whim, politics, bias, and economics as they were to inspiration. Gutjahr chronicles the debate between the traditional King James Version and the new Revised Version, noting that though the Revised Version attracted only five to ten percent of the market, it still opened the door for Americans to deliberate seriously which core biblical text they would choose for their homes.

In chapter four, "Pedagogy," Gutjahr reveals the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in America as each group attempted to assure that its preferred version of the Bible was placed into their children's classrooms. This conflict, he argues, would "lay the foundation for displacing the Bible as America's most commonly read text by challenging the role of religious sectarianism in the country's public schools" (118).

Mormon readers may find Gutjahr's fifth chapter, "Popularity," the most provocative, for here he devotes

seven pages to the Book of Mormon, "the most audacious rendering of Christ's life to appear in the nineteenth century" (151). He asserts that although most nineteenth-century Protestants decried the corrupting influence of fictional writing (as did Brigham Young), those same Protestants paradoxically began to turn to fictional adaptations of biblical stories "as a viable means. . .to become imaginative participants in the Bible's narrative" (147).

Gutjahr cites several sentimental works—including Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World*, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur*—as examples of nineteenth-century novels that achieved unprecedented popularity because they exposed readers to the values of the Bible within contemporary settings. However, he argues, this continued evolution of "The Good Book" (now into a secular romance) served to diminish further the active role of the Bible in American homes. The family's Bible maintained a site of high visibility in the home, but the parents and children were reading *Ben-Hur* instead because it was easier to understand and more exciting to read.

It is not unreasonable to apply Gutjahr's thesis to the Book of Mormon. Mormon readers may no longer grapple with the core text of the Book of Mormon because, although videos, tapes, and CDs may make the Book of Mormon more accessible, those same media dilute the Book of Mormon narrative. As a child, I read Delta Petersen Neeley's four volumes of the "condensed version" of the Book of Mormon. My children watched *The Living Scriptures: Animated Stories of the Book of Mormon* videos published by J. S. Publishing, Inc. (1992), as well as *Book of Mormon Stories* videos published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (1978), and they listened to

The Tennis Shoes Adventures by Chris Heimerdinger (1998). I can thus imagine how—in our print, video, audio, and hypertext culture—the Book of Mormon may be following the same path as the Bible.

Mormon readers may find unsettling, however, Gutjahr's inclusion of the Book of Mormon alongside several popular works of nineteenth-century fiction. For although it is true that the absence of biblical formatting in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon makes the narrative more seamless and more like a novel, it is also true that the Book of Mormon so differs from *The Wide, Wide World* in tone, style, and content that a discussion of the two works in the same chapter becomes problematic.

Gutjahr assumes that Joseph Smith chose the binding for the Book of Mormon, "imitated" King James English, placed Jesus in the American continent, and represented the Savior as "the ultimate example of moral behavior" (156) with the intent to invoke a sacred authenticity in the text, appeal to readers' nationalism, satisfy readers' curiosity regarding Native American origins, and also provide an "uncorrupted biblical text" that stood as an "answer to a mutilated Gospel record" (153). In making these assumptions, he suggests that Joseph Smith was either a creative artist comparable to Harriet Beecher Stowe or a cunning charlatan passing off fiction as scripture.

As an historian and close reader, Gutjahr demonstrates considerable skills. However, he fails to provide convincing evidence that the conversion appeal of the Book of Mormon lay in its linkage of the Christian Messiah with the American continent (a section that comprises only 29 pages in a book of 531 pages) or its explanation of how American Indians arrived on American shores. Gutjahr fails, for example, to note any of the numerous spiritual

conversion testimonies of the Book of Mormon by early members of the church. The Book of Mormon may indeed have been an integral part of a new religious tradition that offered the chance to restore and enjoy Eden-like bliss in the United States (158), but to produce 37 British and American editions by 1880, the Book of Mormon may have been as much a sacred text as a creative romance to be shelved alongside *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

An American Bible belongs in every college and university in the United States. It belongs in the home of anyone interested in the evolution of the Bible in America and the effect the print medium has had on one of the Mormon church's four standard works. Gutjahr's tone is fair; his style is clean and concise; his scholarship is thorough yet accessible. *An American Bible* also belongs in the hands of any individual who has a personal connection with The Bible. I have vivid memories of reading my family's leather-bound copy of the Consolidated Book Publishers' *The Holy Bible, the Good Savior Edition* (1950) and of studying its numerous reproductions of original paintings by J. James Tissot. Gutjahr's text caused me to reflect upon those memories. It caused me to ask why I still cling to my missionary Bible even though the spine is broken and several pages are torn. It caused me to ask tough questions about how the Mormon church is now marketing the Book of Mormon. This is the test of a "good book." Does it allow the reader to enter into the conversation of the text? Gutjahr's study passes the test. As a non-Mormon scholar of Mormonism, Gutjahr should be welcomed to extend his interests and research to Mormon texts and embraced as a scholar whose expertise in cultural studies can only add new insights into a neglected area of American history.