

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Mormon Straight/Gay Marriages

I've just had a look at the Fall 2005 issue. I commend you on the way you handled the Ben Christensen/Ron Schow/Marybeth Raynes material ("Getting Out/Staying In: One Mormon Straight/Gay Marriage," 38, no. 3 [Fall 2005]: 121–51) relating to homosexuality in a Mormon context.

These perspectives make a valuable contribution to the dialogue on this subject now available to Latter-day Saints by recognizing the complexity of the interface between doctrine and real experience and by illustrating the damage potentially resulting from oversimplification. Such honest discussion is much needed in the Church. In thus promoting it, your journal lives up to its name.

I like very much your decision to give Ben Christensen the last word. Situated as he is in the existential soup, he deserves it. His response does him credit. My heart goes out to Ben and Jessie (and others like them) and I wish them well.

Wayne Schow
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Correction of Wording

I wish to comment on the call for papers "on the prospects and problems of persons with disabilities" (*Dialogue* 38, no. 1 [Spring 2005]: 195, and *Dialogue* 38, no. 2 [Summer 2005]: 204). I'd like to point out that the wording in the first sentence, i.e., "the disabled," is

considered offensive by many. *Disabled* encourages other people to see the disability, not the person.

The preferred term, which was also used several times in the call, is "persons with disabilities," or "people with disabilities." As a somewhat pedantic English major, I prefer the latter; however, the author of that call seems to think that "the disabled" is interchangeable with "person with disabilities." The terms are not interchangeable.

Whatever term is chosen should put the emphasis on the person, not the disability. I hope that when these issues of *Dialogue* are published, people who are educated about these issues will be called upon to make sure that you've got it right.

Paula Goodfellow
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Fairness to FARMS

I recommend that *Dialogue* stay away from the view that seems to be common among some in the LDS intellectual community that FARMS is *a priori* wrong about everything it touches. An embarrassing example of this attitude occurs in Bill Russell's review of Dan Vogel's *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* ("He Was 'Game,'" *Dialogue* 38, no. 3 [Fall 2005]: 188–92).

Russell writes: "Vogel has not written an anti-Mormon book. Contrary to the reviews published in FARMS, Vogel's book is moderate and bal-

anced" (190). The only problem is that, as of the time Russell's review was published, FARMS hadn't published any reviews of the book. Not a single one. I realize this kind of knee-jerk reaction plays well among certain readers, but as an academic journal *Dialogue* should rise above it.

FARMS is not a monolith; it is a scholarly clearinghouse. It has published more than three hundred authors, including people like Klaus Hansen and Jan Shipp. It's fine to take FARMS to task for its actual sins, whatever they may be, but not on an *a priori* basis as Russell did.

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We Blush

Enclosed is a check for \$35 for a year's subscription. I'm a bit short right now, but soon I'll send \$100 and you can extend my subscription to four years. I love what you are doing with *Dialogue*.

Dialogue has all the erudition, rigor, and prestige of a top-drawer academic journal. It has the culture, social sensitivity, warmth, and grace of well-written, excellently edited, personal correspondence. That's difficult to achieve.

Larry Day
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Treasure Lore Revisited

I agree with Larry Morris that Ronald V. Huggins's essay "From Captain Kidd's Treasure Ghost to the Angel Moroni: Changing *Dramatis Personae* in Early Mormonism" (*Dialogue* 36, no. 4 [Winter 2003]: 17-42), should have

been more critical of the sources, but Morris's critique ("Folklore Rebutted," *Dialogue* 38, no. 3 [Fall 2005]: vi-x) did little to improve that situation.

While Morris is correct in assessing the sources in terms of firsthand/secondhand testimony and early/late composition, applying these standards is not as mechanical and automatic as he implies. Historical sources and their relationships to one another can be complex, and often there are other complicating factors to consider. Historiography is a disciplined craft, to be sure, but there are no hard and fast formulas. Whereas Morris accuses Huggins of "mismanag[ing] the sources," I found Morris's handling reductionistic, despite his appeal to cultural relativism at the end.

Historical standards are guides in assessing evidence, not apologetic devices designed to dismiss out-of-hand undesirable testimony. The best example of Morris's misuse of historical methodology is his hasty dismissal of Willard Chase's 1833 report of what he had learned from Joseph Smith Sr. in 1827 about Joseph Jr.'s claimed 1823 encounter with "Moroni." Morris argues, "Even if [Chase] recalled the conversation accurately" (and Morris has no reason to doubt otherwise), "his secondhand version at best represents the view of Joseph Sr." What is that supposed to mean? Is Morris suggesting that Joseph Sr. did not accurately report what Joseph Jr. was claiming? Does he have a cogent argument supporting this theory? And doesn't this suggestion undo the pre-

ferred status of what he calls “firsthand accounts”?

Regarding hearsay evidence, historiographer Louis Gottschalk states in his well-known *Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method*: “Thus hearsay evidence would not be discarded by the historian, as it would be by a law court, merely because it is hearsay. It is unacceptable only in so far as it cannot be established as accurate reporting of primary testimony” (2d ed. [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969], 165–66).

While Morris declines to discuss Chase’s testimony, a closer look reveals that it is a highly credible account since many of its details are corroborated in other independent sources. Even Richard L. Anderson has admitted that Chase’s affidavit “contains more parallels to Mormon sources than any other [Hurlbut] affidavit” (“Joseph Smith’s New York Reputation Reappraised,” *BYU Studies* 10 [Spring 1970]: 296). Both Joseph Knight Sr. and Lucy Smith support Chase’s claim that Joseph Jr. took the plates out of the box and violated instructions by laying them down; the plates disappeared, then reappeared in the box, and Smith was prevented by supernatural power from removing them again. Knight said Smith cannot “stur” the book, but similar to Chase, Lucy said Joseph was “hurled back upon the ground with great violence” when he tried to retake the plates.

Paralleling Chase, Knight also remembered the instruction for Smith to bring Alvin the following year, Smith’s inability to get the plates in 1824 because Alvin had died in the interim, and the instruction to bring the right

person. On this last item, Knight seems confused, claiming that Smith looked into his stone and saw that this correct person was Emma Hale “for he had Bin Down there Before with me.” However, Smith did not meet Emma until he boarded at her father’s home in 1825. Chase, on the other hand, said Smith at first thought the right individual was fellow treasure seer Samuel Lawrence, but later, after meeting Emma, decided she was the right person (Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996–2003], 1:297–98 [Lucy Smith]; 2:66–68, 71 [Willard Chase]; 4:12–14 [Joseph Knight]; hereafter EMD). With such documentary support, Morris would have a difficult time demonstrating that Chase’s account is not an “accurate reporting of primary testimony.”

Even when Chase departs from Mormon sources and reports that Joseph Jr. “saw in the box something like a toad, which soon assumed the appearance of a man, and struck him on the side of his head,” he is supported by Benjamin Saunders’s 1884 non-Mormon but friendly testimony (EMD 2:137). Rather than hearing the story from Joseph Sr., Saunders claimed he heard it directly from Joseph Jr.

Although this account meets Morris’s requirement for “firsthand” testimony, he dismisses the toad story as a later embellishment without acknowledging support from Chase’s 1833 statement. Morris’s procedure of dismissing Chase because he is not firsthand and Saunders because he is late is a good example of why general prin-

ciples cannot be applied like inflexible laws.

Nonetheless, Morris was right to question the accuracy of the 1879 account of the Lewis brothers, not simply because it is a late account but especially because it can be demonstrated fairly easily not to be an "accurate reporting of primary testimony." Although their account is similar to earlier accounts that describe Joseph Smith being knocked down and instructed to return with the right person, the Lewises obviously erred when they described the receptacle of the plates as an "iron box" and the guardian of the plates as "a Spaniard, having a long beard coming down over his breast . . . with his . . . throat cut from ear to ear, and the blood streaming down" (EMD 4:303–4).

In *Early Mormon Documents*, I made a suggestion that Huggins and Morris should not have ignored: "This description sounds more like the guardian spirit over Captain Kidd's treasure, which the Lewises may have confused with the messenger Smith confronted trying to get the plates" (4:304 note 21). Obviously, the "spirit" guarding the plates was not a "Spaniard"; according to Cole, Joseph Sr. described this spirit as "a little old man with a long beard" (EMD 4:245), which is similar to David Whitmer's description (EMD 5:45). It therefore seems probable that the Lewises unintentionally conflated elements from Joseph Smith's 1825 attempt to locate a Spanish treasure in the hills above Isaac Hale's Harmony home and his 1823 encounter with the guardian spirit on the hill in Manchester.

Despite possible embellishments and confusions in both early and late accounts, Morris's claim that "accounts emphasizing a treasure guardian came later" (p. vii) is simply not true. Morris makes this statement in reference to Benjamin Saunders's 1884 statement about the toad-like creature and Joseph and Hiel Lewis's 1879 account describing the bleeding ghost. Not only is Morris wrong about the toad story coming later, but "Moroni" was linked to treasure guardians long before the Lewises mentioned the bleeding ghost.

Later, Morris recognizes that the "disappearing book" and the "shock" in Knight's and Lucy Smith's accounts are also reflections of Smith's "folk [magic] culture" (x). I would also add thrice-repeated dreams and the need to follow instructions precisely as folk magic elements. Smith's inability to get the plates in 1824 because Alvin had died seems more like the trick of a treasure guardian spirit than what Smith's contemporaries would have expected of an angel.

However, Morris has overlooked an important element in the story that more than anything pointed nineteenth-century minds toward treasure lore: the claim that the plates were protected by the "spirit" of a dead mortal. As D. Michael Quinn has noted, "It was not customary [in Joseph Smith's day] to use 'angel' to describe a personage who had been mortal, had died, and was returning to earth to give a message to someone," while at the same time "the visit of a spirit messenger to a human was common in magic and familiar to folk perceptions"

(*Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, 2d ed. [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998], 140).

When Abner Cole said in 1831 that “Jo Smith never pretended to have any communion with angels, until a long period after the *pretended* finding of his book” (EMD 2:246; emphasis his), he was claiming that there was a shift in meaning between 1823 and 1827, which may very well be true. Cole had earlier commented that “Jo. made league with the spirit, who afterwards turned out to be an angel” (EMD 2:234). Obviously, for Cole angels were distinct beings from ghosts, or the spirits of dead mortals. Because he failed to note this distinction, Mark Ashurst-McGee’s references to “angels” guarding treasures are irrelevant (“Moroni: Angel or Treasure Guardian?” *Mormon Historical Studies* 2, no. 2 [2001]: 47).

According to Gustav Davidson’s *Dictionary of Angels*, the “Angel of Treasures [is] Parasiel,” and that “Parasiel [is] an angelic name inscribed in Hebrew characters on the 1st pentacle of the planet Jupiter. Parasiel is lord and master of treasures” ([New York: Free Press, 1967], 45, 220). This source also states that “Sedekiah [is] a ‘treasure-finding angel’ whose name figures on the pentacle of the planet Jupiter” (263). For the astrological significance of Jupiter to Joseph Smith as well as his possible possession of a Jupiter talisman, I refer readers to Quinn’s extended discussion in *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (pp. 66–97).

By assuming that Joseph Smith and his non-Mormon critics shared the same definition of “angel,” I believe

Morris and Ashurst-McGee have been led to ask the wrong questions, which in turn has led them to make the overly simplistic conclusion that the “early witnesses described an angel who appeared in a religious context” and “later witnesses ‘defrocked’ Moroni.” The question to answer is not: Did Joseph Smith transform a treasure guardian into an angel? But rather: Did Joseph Smith expand his definition of angel to include a particular treasure guardian?

This is certainly a better approach than Morris’s insinuation that Cole invented the story because he was angry with Smith after their confrontation over the unauthorized publication of extracts from the Book of Mormon in his tabloid. Cole prefaced his statement with “it is well known,” so Morris’s fabrication-for-the-sake-of-revenge thesis is highly unlikely. Given the differing definitions, the confusion of Cole and the unnamed others is understandable. Yet there is an element of truth in Cole’s statement. While Lucy and other family members make it clear that God was involved from the start, I think it’s best to regard the word “angel” (as we do the term “Urim and Thummim”) as anachronistic to the 1823 setting.

While Morris focuses on possible embellishments in later accounts, he neglects to mention that the opposite shift occurred in Joseph Smith’s accounts. In his 1838 history, Joseph Smith falsely described his involvement with treasure digging as a one-time event with Josiah Stowell in 1825 and suppressed the truth that he took a leading role as treasure seer not

only in Stowell's but in many such operations. In fact, the seer stone is never mentioned either in association with treasure digging or as the means of translating the Book of Mormon; instead, there are only the spectacles, euphemistically called the "Urim and Thummim." There is no mention of removing the plates and setting them down, no mention of the plates disappearing and reappearing in the box, no mention of Smith being "shocked" or knocked down while attempting to retake the plates. Instead, he simply says, "I made an attempt to take them out, but was forbidden by the messenger."

Again, there is no mention of the requirement to bring Alvin the following year and of Joseph's inability to get the plates in 1824 because Alvin had died;

instead, he knows from the first visit that "the time for bringing [the plates] forth had not yet arrived, neither would it, until four years from that time." If this were true, Smith forgot to tell his family, because Lucy mentions their disappointment when Joseph came home empty-handed after his 1824 visit to the hill. Given the obvious shift away from "folk [magic] culture" in Joseph Smith's account, why is it so hard for Morris and Ashurst-McGee to believe that the luminous "angel Moroni" was once a nameless, bearded treasure-guardian "spirit"?

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