landscape to urban centers, and from the West in general to the faith and commitment that give unity and direction to Mormon life. And we must finally discover behind Mormon folklore typical human beings coming to terms through their lore with enduring life and death questions that know neither temporal nor cultural boundaries." And to do that, he points out, "We must begin with the religious individual, with *homo religiosus*" (180).

Wilson follows his own advice to begin with the individual in the concluding essay in the volume, "Personal Narratives," in which he explores how the reminiscences of his mother, Lucile Green Wilson, constitute a kind of "family novel" (270). These family stories are "based on history, [and] sometimes approximate history, but are not history." Instead, "they are fictions—stories created from carefully selected events from their own lives, just as short stories, novels, and epics are created from carefully selected details from the worlds of their authors" (268). Wilson continues:

> Reduced to cold print, the stories may not seem particularly artful. But if you could have been there during the tellings, if you could have seen my mother's gestures and facial expressions, if you could have heard her voice rise in excited exclamation, drop now to a hushed whisper, move to a dry chuckle, break into tears—if you, that is, could have heard these stories in live performance, with a charged and ongoing dynamic relation occurring between teller and listeners, you would have understood their power to excite my fancy, engage my sympathies, and move me with joy or terror. (269)

This moving essay probes "the marrow of human experience" by examining simultaneously Wilson's mother's experiences as represented by her stories and Wilson's own experience as a listener-participant at their performance. It provides a fitting culmination to the volume and clarifies Wilson's earlier declaration: "What we must have . . . is not more studies of folklore *in* literature, but rather careful analyses of folklore *as* literature" (15).

Big Wonderful, Little Masterpiece

Kevin Holdsworth. *Big Wonderful: Notes from Wyoming.* Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2006. 192 pp., $26.95.

Reviewed by Mary Lythgoe Bradford, Leesburg, Virginia, who once wrote a partial

memoir called, Leaving Home: Personal Essays *(Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987)*

Kevin Holdsworth is a real salt-of-the-earth Wyoming transplant much like my alkali-of-the-earth ancestors who settled the Big Horn Basin in 1900. A bona fide naturalist-environmentalist, he fearlessly explores trailheads in the mountains around him, speaking honestly about their dangers and amusingly about the god-awful Wyoming winds and treacherous weather patterns. He is frank about his reasons for leaving Utah, that "cemetery with lights," escaping across the border into Green River, Wyoming (18).

The sub-title, "Notes from Wyoming," is a catch-all for his poetry, essays, bits of essays, and other people's poetry in an appealing coming-of-age journal that takes him through his early life in Utah, his move to Wyoming, his second marriage to Jennifer, not a Mormon, and the difficult birth of their only son. He is now in his mid-forties, so we may expect an engaging sequel.

The first section, "Howdy," introduces Holdsworth as a young man with "the ability to keep two opposites in mind," which he claims helps him "to negotiate this vale of tears." It may have something to do with "the way past and present co-exist in our minds. Where we are is also where we have been. We have to escape in order to return" (4). My sentiments exactly!

His desire to leave Utah leads him to Hoboken, New Jersey—on Sinatra's street—and writing his first Western. He believed that leaving for the Big Apple would satisfy his lust for the larger world. But he found Manhattan to be the "most insular, self-absorbed, indeed the most provincial" (4) destination ever, only twelve miles long, in contrast to Wyoming where you can walk thirteen miles without seeing a soul. While writing his unsuccessful Western, he realized that he had to leave the West in order to make peace with his westerness—and Mormonness.

As a "callow yet sunburned and romantic youth," he began to think that nature "held all the truth and the beauty" in contrast to Salt Lake City, "the most industrious, business-adept, hard-won-is-virtuous, and heaven-headed society imaginable" (7). Even though Mormon hymns celebrate the everlasting hills, nature is kept at arm's length and exists to be subdued. He realized that the mountains and their canyons were his true home, their flowery meadows the playground that took him

out of his "stultifying life" (8). He realized that his family is important to him; but despite the sincere efforts of many worthy folk, he knew he could never fit in.

Holdsworth's family lived in Holladay, Utah, just a few miles south of East Mill Creek, my childhood home, and he attended the same schools, though much later. He begins one of his essays with an apology to his art teacher, one Jay Henefer who won my own pubescent loyalty when he lovingly critiqued my primitive paintings. Holdsworth, who was in Henefer's detention classes, now knows that Henefer was guarding values buried in the artificiality of today's malls, home developments, and other materialistic symbols. His teacher liked to be addressed as "Jay of Henefer" as in "Leonardo of Vinci," a reminder of lost glory. Holdsworth pays tribute to the village of Henefer, which happens to house the graves of my Lythgoe founding pioneers. "Located on the middle run of the Weber River just where the Mormon Trail took a hard wrong-way left . . . to become a crossroads going to Zion or on to California," Henefer is now "under siege from trophy houses and the Wasatch-back growth" (17).

By leaving Utah, Holdsworth learns to value his ancestry. He becomes an expert on the Willie Company of handcart pioneers and joins a protest movement designed to stop the LDS Church from leasing Martin's Cove. I myself visited Martin's Cove with the Mormon History Association in 2006, where I was suddenly gripped by a desire to know better my great-grandmother, Margaret Kewley of the Martin Company, who with her parents and brothers left the Isle of Man for the snows of Wyoming. Holdsworth, too, allows his research into his Willie ancestors to lead him further into understanding and respecting his Mormon background.

Holdsworth objects to Mormon ownership of public lands because it violates church-state traditions and damages the land with its tourism. He looks askance at the "re-creations" of the handcart disaster. "If the pilgrims really want to gain an appreciation of their forebears' hardships, they should make the journey in February, and if they are interested in historical veracity their pilgrimage should last 100 days rather than the current three days filled with socializing, testimonials, song, propane lanterns, and other modern conveniences" (89). To substantiate his point, he cites a co-founder of the Alliance for Historic Wyoming and also historian Lyndia MacDowell Carter, whose research has documented twenty-five to thirty deaths at Devil's Gate and none at the site the Church claims as sa-

cred (89). He concludes that "the case for the historical importance of Martin's Cove is not a strong one" (90).

He also feels queasy about using the deaths of ancestors for missionary purposes. In fact, he thinks it wrong to make a public relations coup out of the handcart tragedy. And still he asks himself, "How can I honor my ancestors' sacrifice, if I don't believe the creed?"; then answers his own question: "I cannot reach out to them across the ages except by knowing these places and trying to know what the crossing meant, for it was the singly defining moment in their lives and indeed in ours" (97). "The story is one of faith, surely," he says. "It is also a story of survival, of fortitude, of Holy Wrath, of humanity . . . " (99–100).

Kevin and Jennifer became plaintiffs in the lawsuit that pitted the ACLU and the Western Land Exchange against the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in the agreement that gave management control of Martin's Cove to the LDS Church. After many emails and meetings, a miracle happened. The case was settled out of court in a settlement that allowed all parties to claim victory. "Hey," says Holdsworth, "the system works. Sometimes it is good to talk over one's differences. It's possible to reach a compromise, to be realistic about limits. Talking is better than fighting" (92).

The remaining chapters are equally inspiring. Holdsworth crafts a love letter to Wyoming, but his love is not blind. He recognizes its inhospitable climate, its boom-and-bust economy, its go-it-alone mentality. Nonetheless, he cultivates it and learns from it.

Amused at his own inadequacies, Holdsworth treats us to exciting encounters with avalanches, bears, and wild horses. He rescues his beloved dog from a frozen river and lingers over the birth of his son, Christopher, who survives a frightening operation to become his companionable pupil. When Kevin's mother refuses to attend her grandson's non-Mormon christening, he is forgiving, especially when his father and brother defy his mother and show up.

Holdsworth closes the book with a beautiful meditation, advising Christopher to "sit still and watch . . . , to dawdle on a warm day becoming windy, to attend to this shallow lake beneath granite hills . . . , to share in the knowledge that none of it lasts long enough, . . . but that the best way to honor its values is to be here to see it" (88).

I agree with the *Deseret News* reviewer (and yes, in the interests of full disclosure, he's my brother) who called Holdsworth "a convincing presence, and a Western writer with a future" (Dennis Lythgoe, "Big Won-

derful: Notes from Wyoming," *Deseret Morning News,* Sunday, February 4, 2007).