

### Notes

1. “Children’s literature” includes picture books for very young children all the way up through novels for older readers—and technically includes the subgenre of young adult literature, meaning novels and other forms of literature for readers twelve and up. However, generally the designation “children’s literature” means literature for children under twelve, while “young adult” means the twelve-and-over set. Both are very broad categories that take in wide developmental ranges.

2. Katherine Paterson, Official Website, Questions (2007), <http://www.terabithia.com/questions.html> (accessed November 29, 2007).

3. Orson Scott Card wrote an excellent essay on what I’m referring to here, addressing how *depicting* evil and *advocating* evil are two very different things, a nuance lost on some audiences. See his “The Problem of Evil in Fiction,” available in the collection *A Storyteller in Zion: Essays and Speeches* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993), 69–98.

4. C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (1956; rpt. New York: HarperCollins, 1984), 154–55.

5. Scott M. Roberts, comment, *Stacy Whitmore’s Grimoire* [blogspot], November 21, 2007, <http://slwhitman.livejournal.com/78603.html#cutid1> (accessed November 29, 2007).

6. Middle grade is a subclassification of children’s literature, novels for independent readers of about ages eight to twelve.

## Innocent Hooligan

Douglas Thayer. *Hooligan: A Mormon Boyhood*. Provo, Utah: Zarahemla Books, 2007. 186 pp., paper, \$14.95

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A staple of Douglas Thayer’s fiction is the sensitive, adolescent or young adult Mormon male struggling to come to terms with the burdens of mortality, a sense of sin, or the pressures of exemplary living. Now, in a memoir, Thayer deals more directly with his own experiences of growing up in the old Provo Sixth Ward during the 1930s and ’40s. Curiously, the authorial voice in the memoir is almost entirely devoid of the complicated inner life of Thayer’s fictional protagonists. He maintains a cool, rather

detached, faintly ironic narrative tone throughout, with only oblique hints at something more deeply involved.

Thayer gives us a detailed inventory of the Depression- and World War II-era milieu through which he and his friends moved. The organization is topical, one topic following close upon another and often mingling the experiences of adolescence with those of early childhood.

*Hooligan* is a book of lists—not a bad thing in a social document: “Although healthy and active for the most part, we boys sometimes found ourselves diseased or wounded, or both. Measles, mumps, chicken pox, scarlet fever, whooping cough, rheumatic fever, polio, flu, sore throats, tonsillitis, infected ears, appendicitis, broken arms and legs, sprains, cuts, blood poisoning, and lockjaw. . .” (52). A fairly comprehensive catalogue of the ills to which flesh is susceptible. Even the chapter titles are random lists—“tomato soup, brutality, dancing, nosebleeds, fire escape”; or less random lists—“work, laziness, rotten laziness, damned rotten laziness.”

The overriding impression I gained from the happy abundance of remembered experiences is of the immense freedom enjoyed by small-town boys of an earlier generation. Thayer and his friends had no organized sports, no after-school programs, no lessons, no adults whose job it was to keep them safe or entertained. They attended school, had daily chores around the house, and were expected to get part-time jobs when they were old enough. But this left great stretches of free time for prowling the streets, looking into shops and pool halls, hunting, fishing, swimming naked at the Provo River swimming hole called the Crusher, building cardboard cities or fighting rubber-gun wars in vacant lots and abandoned sheds, and taking in the Saturday matinee double features at the Uinta Theater.

The author writes that he and his friends enjoyed thinking of themselves as “hooligans,” largely because “it had a nice sound” (38), but the level of hooliganism presented in the memoir is pretty mild, limited to such activities as smoking cedar bark, stealing the occasional egg from a neighbor’s chicken coop, or tossing rocks through the windows of derelict buildings. The boys cheerfully slaughtered as many fish, birds, and small mammals as came within reach of their hooks or firearms, and aspired, especially during the war, to larger and more destructive weaponry, but through it all there is an overriding sense of innocence. One charming moment occurs when the author, encountering for the first time a girl wearing a backless gown at a high school dance, discreetly covers his hand with his clean handkerchief to avoid the contact of flesh on flesh.