beauty amid a grievous context, the former heifer noses her newborn calf, and the calf "[flaps] its ears and [makes] a start" (166). The best story of the bunch, "Liquidating Earl Haws" deftly avoids moralizing and ends on an affecting note of poetry and non-resolution.

Readers looking for quiet stories of complex emotion and human struggle will enjoy this carefully-wrought collection. Cozzens deserves to be read, and this collection is a welcome addition to contemporary Mormon fiction.

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Past Second Base

Joey Franklin. *My Wife Wants You to Know I'm Happily Married.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015. 194 pp. Paper: $19.95. ISBN: 978-0-8032-7844-8.

Reviewed by Eric Freeze

At the last Association of Writiers & Writing Programs conference, a famed historical literary figure stood for pictures and selfies next to booths piled high with books. He was bald except for a tuft of hair in the middle of his head and a dark goatee and handlebar mustache. In a more mainstream context, people would probably think he was Shakespeare with his brocade doublet and puffy sleeves. But most images of Shakespeare emphasize his shoulder-length bob. And Shakespeare wore a stiff collar, not a pleated ruff. Maybe the actor just didn't have the hair? And why the goatee? But anyone who has studied the history of the essay knew immediately when they saw him: it was Michel de Montaigne.

Conference-goers would soon find that the actor who so closely resembles the French essayist (minus the stick-on facial hair and Renaissance garb) was actually Joey Franklin, a professor of creative writing at

Brigham Young University and author of *My Wife Wants You to Know I'm Happily Married,* published by the University of Nebraska Press. Like Franklin's elaborate performance art, banking on his striking likeness to Montaigne, his essay collection similarly channels Montaigne's literary influence. Franklin's winding essays truly *essay*—or try out a concept or idea by tying together various personal, cultural, and academic ephemera. Franklin essays about kissing, about fast food jobs, about T-ball parenting, and about his father's incarceration. Each subject has its fair share of reflection and examination, combined with narrative and description. The revelations aren't earth-shattering—I get the feeling Franklin would be suspicious of them if they were—but instead sit on the tongue like a great vintage of a non-alcoholic wine. But although they may look alike, Joey Franklin is not Montaigne. He's a contemporary Montaigne. A Mormon Montaigne.

Probably Franklin's most interesting work in the collection happens when the subject matter pushes boundaries of Mormon culture. When Franklin was seven, his father was incarcerated, causing rifts and tensions in an otherwise seemingly normal LDS home. Franklin plies the experience for insights about father-son communication, about the ways that parents and children mirror each other or hide their insecurities or inadequacies behind the guise of adulthood. In "Grand Theft Auto: Athens, Ohio, Edition," Franklin writes about the theft of his maroon Ford Escort, a family car so trashed that they left the keys in it. An interloper steals the car even though it's the most beat-up one on the lot: "When [the thief] lifts the handle, he not only finds the doors unlocked, but by the street lamp's glow I'm sure he notices a camping chair, a folding bike rack, and two car seats. Never mind the interior smells of rotten milk and stale Cheerios; never mind the diapers and fast-food wrappers covering the floor; never mind the cracker crumbs smashed into the upholstery. This car is open, and hey, look there, in the tray beneath the emergency brake—a set of keys" (33). Franklin's essay then follows this hypothetical thief through the next forty-eight hours, through cans of

beer and oxycodone, through his freeloading drive around southeastern Ohio with two girl friends to the car's eventual recovery after the driver turns into a patrol car without signaling. The ironies pile up in this essay: the car Franklin's family wants to purchase as a replacement has a theft-retrieved title, and their grad-school poverty is offset by the more desperate poverty of the incarcerated thieves. The irony questions the assumptions and entitlements that govern their lives. Shouldn't they be angry? Vindictive? But someone has it worse. They're protected by insurance and can always get another car.

Perhaps that's what I found so compelling about this collection: it takes either seemingly benign or extraordinary subject matter and then complicates those subjects through introspection, juxtaposition, or analysis. One of the strongest pieces is "Working at Wendy's," an essay about getting a minimum-wage stop-gap job while Franklin's spouse was completing university. At the time, Franklin had a graduate degree and other employment, but the proximity of Wendy's and the flexible hours drew him to the job. He was, in a word, different from the single moms and ex-felons or college dropouts that constitute the majority of this particular Wendy's workforce. His difference is apparent from the very beginning: "As I hand the manager my résumé, I realize it is a mistake. He doesn't want to know my service experience, or my academic references, or my GPA. All he wants to know is whether I can spell my name correctly" (21). Rather than moralize about his position through interpretation or speculation, Franklin instead chooses objective juxtaposition. He tells his story, relays what he hears from those around him, and then goes home to his wife and young child. The juxtaposition here shows us what introspection cannot: that while his colleagues are trapped in a narrative not of their own making, Joey can leave at any time. And the empathy and care Franklin takes in telling their stories shows us that that is a kind of injustice.

The essays also exhibit a range of formal innovation. The T-ball essay, for example, is written in second person, an appropriate choice for an essay that performs itself on its subject matter in such an incriminating way. The "you" here stands for Franklin's actual lived experience and dilemmas about how to parent a talented child in an over-competitive sport, but it also implicates the reader in a way that makes us question how we also reinforce the stories that we tell young boys about excellence in sports. We're thrust into this uncomfortable position of promoting a talented child while simultaneously being aware of the forces at play around us.

Other essays look at his family, particularly his relationship with his spouse. In the first essay about the lifespan of a kiss, Franklin acknowledges that, "Needless to say, she's had some reservations about the writing of this book" (18). An essay on dancing, "The Swing is Gone," delves into aspects of their courtship, how, even though she wasn't as serious a dancer, she was still eager to learn and willing to support Franklin when he competed with his dance partner. Franklin finds this intriguing, which leads him to make changes in his life and eventually to abandon competitive dance. He chooses another center, another obsession. As the title of the book and the title essay last essay suggest, Franklin's spouse, Melissa, inhabits the work—proof of what a lasting marriage can be. His wife wants us to know, and through her, so does Franklin.

My Wife Wants You to Know I'm Happily Married is pleasurable, aesthetically interesting, thoughtful, and complex, if at times a little thematically safe. If there is any fault in the book, it is this: it reinforces rather than challenges the rules it has prescribed for itself. It's a book that's aware of its limitations, as unpretentious as its t-shirt-festooned cover. It has male-pattern baldness, a diminutive name, and it will never get past second base. But I think that's also partly the point. Within those self-prescribed limitations, the book is a delight.