The Truth is in the Middle

Stephen Carter and Jett Atwood. *Mormonism for Beginners.* Danbury, Conn.: For Beginners, 2016. 193 pp. Paperback: $15.95. ISBN: 9781939994523.

Reviewed by Cristina Rosetti

Introductory texts often face the challenge of which topics to cover and how much detail to include. In *Mormonism for Beginners,* author Stephen Carter and illustrator Jett Atwood strike the perfect balance between comprehensive survey and accessibility. This is accomplished through both compelling prose and lively illustration. The first page opens with the exclamation, "It's a religion! It's a subculture! It's a Broadway show!" To adequately demonstrate the multifaceted nature of Mormonism, the text aims to offer readers an introduction to both the religion and culture of Mormonism, including a brief history of the tradition, an introduction to LDS scripture, the life of Church members, and challenging topics. As an important contribution, Carter's work demonstrates how history and theology are actively present within the lives of Church members. Rather than introduce the reader to an abstract picture of Mormon belief and practice, the text demonstrates the ways in which Mormonism exists as a lived religion that is both dynamic and evolving.

From the onset of the text, the author makes the important qualification that this book covers one of many traditions that trace their roots to Joseph Smith. Through this single statement, the author makes known the text's wider aim of providing a comprehensive and inclusive representation of Mormonism. Too often, as the author states, introductions to Mormonism act as either propaganda or diatribe. In response, Carter asserts that, "The truth lies somewhere in the middle" (vi). Neither a tool for conversion nor an attempt to debunk the faith, this text succeeds at providing balance and understanding to a complex religious tradition.

While the book does assume some knowledge on the part of the reader, the author seeks to provide enough background to make the history accessible to those unfamiliar with the religion's past. The first part of the text provides this background through a brief sketch of Mormon history. Carter presents an incredible amount of information in a short section that covers the life of Joseph Smith, the translation of the Book of Mormon, Zion's Camp, Kirtland, Missouri, Nauvoo, movement to Utah, and much more. As early as the first part of the text, the author exemplifies an ability to present challenging topics well. A clear example of this is the explanation of the First Vision. Rather than focus on the 1838 version, Carter gives a brief description of all four versions as well as the significance of each. While noting the debate that stems from multiple accounts, the author places importance on the impact the narrative offers. Debate aside, the message held within the First Vision narrative remains the most repeated and transformative story within the Mormon tradition.

Throughout the historical chapters, Carter follows the early Saints from New York, Missouri, Kirtland, Nauvoo, and Salt Lake City. In order to present a detailed picture of each historical moment in the early years of the Church, the author breaks up the chapters by geographical location and the significant events that occurred within each settlement. From the beginning, the text finds strength in its balanced portrayal of Mormonism's history. Chapters are dedicated to topics such as polygamy, the diversity within the Mormon faith, and the Mountain Meadows massacre. At the same time, the author covers westward migration, statehood, and attempts toward assimilation. By following members of the Church through a journey of both success and hardship, the reader is left with the conclusion that Mormonism is both evolving and dynamic.

Following a historical introduction to the faith, the author spends the second part of the text covering the various scriptures used within the Church. As with the first part, the author is once again successful in tackling controversial issues with balance and nuance. A noteworthy

example is Book of Mormon historicity and the translation of the Book of Abraham. In the case of the Book of Mormon, the author notes that the importance of the text is not found in its historical accuracy but its success as a scripture regardless of origin. Turning to the Book of Abraham, the author points to the controversy surrounding the text while also incorporating the views of apologists and Church scholars. By providing multiple perspectives, the author creates space for a wide audience. Unlike many introductory texts that simply present the history and translation of the Book of Mormon, this chapter is significant because it offers the reader an introduction to the narrative and the primary figures held within the Book of Mormon. This section ends with a discussion of open canon and continued revelation through a brief look at general conference and the words of Church leaders.

The third section of the text paints a picture of Mormon life. This includes an introduction to the organization of the Church at the ward, stake, and general level, the Church community, missionary work, temples, and family. Central to this section is the idea that the Church is more than Sunday meetings. Rather, it encompasses the entire life of the believer. Each facet of life, from birth, to adolescence, to adulthood, is marked by the Church community and individual involvement. For this reason, the author spends a significant amount of time addressing the difficulty of faith crises and the ability to rebuild following challenges to one's religious worldview. While not everyone will experience these challenges, faith exists on a spectrum and there are resources available for various stages of life and belief.

Few topics interest outsiders as much as Mormon temples. Carter presents the temple as the space where ordinances are performed and a core component of the Mormon religion is accomplished: the redemption of the deceased. He writes of temples: "They're the place where Mormons perform the herculean task of making up for thousands of years of apostasy by giving every single child of God a chance at receiving his or her temple ordinances by proxy" (131). Beginning with the temple interview,

the author traces the journey to the temple and offers a brief outline of the ordinances and their significance to believers. Without giving too many specifics, the author allows for an inside view of the temple and its centrality. Again, difficult questions are addressed—in this case, the Masonic origins of the ceremony. While the temple is often a point of confusion and interest for outsiders, the temple holds a central place in the religious life of the believer. For this reason, perspective becomes important for fostering understanding. In closing, Carter argues, "For many non-Mormons, temple ceremonies can seem strange, even a little sinister. But from an anthropological perspective, the temple ceremony is utterly normal" (142).

Currently, scholarship on faith crises has come to the forefront. Much of this work seeks to address difficult topics from Mormonism's past and present. As a unique and important contribution to introductory texts, Carter devotes an entire section to the challenging questions that occupy a central place in current scholarship. Specific attention is given to the topics of race and the priesthood, women and the priesthood, LGBT issues, the historicity of the Book of Mormon, and the online essays produced by the Church. Because of the text's recent publication, Mama Dragons, Ordain Women, and other topics not previously covered in introductory texts are addressed. This section sets this text apart as one of the most comprehensive and transparent introductions to Mormonism. At the same time, discussion of the contemporary challenges once again demonstrates the multifaceted nature of Mormonism.

The final section of the text offers an overview of an individual Mormon's life from the conception of the spiritual being by Heavenly Parents to the hope of creating a world for oneself in the eternities. This section uses immense illustration and humor to depict significant theological doctrines, such as the creation of intelligences and the plan of salvation, as well as important events and milestones in the traditional Mormon life. In closing, the author presents the afterlife of a member of the Church as one of continued service in the work of salvation and progression.

Mormonism for Beginners is marked by its humor, transparency, and balance. Throughout its survey of Mormon history, scripture, Mormon life, and challenging topics, the author and illustrator accomplish the monumental task of covering a wide range of material in a way that is both compelling and engaging. Truly, the text accomplishes the arduous task given to introductory books of providing a rich and detailed portrayal of a complex topic. This text would serve as an important addition to both introductory courses on Mormonism and a starting point for anyone interested in learning more about American religious traditions.

Invisible Men / Invincible Women

Eric Freeze. *Invisible Men: Stories.* San Francisco: Outpost 19, 2016. 150 pp. Paperback: $16.00. ISBN: 9781944853020.

Reviewed by Lisa Rumsey Harris

The gaze of the girl on the cover of Eric Freeze's short story collection arrested me—stopped me. Her eyes, full of hostility, told me that if I opened the book, I would be intruding. Her bright knee-length plaid skirt, reminiscent of schoolgirl uniforms, belied the knowledge behind her glare. If it wasn't for her posture, her arms embracing something, I wouldn't have noticed the titular Invisible Man next to her on the cover.

Her warning wasn't wrong. I felt like an intruder as I began to read. I could only take it in small doses—read, then turn the ideas over and over in my mind, like rubbing a smooth stone between my fingers.

I entered the book through the first story, "Duplex," a fragmented narrative that unfolds in disinterested third-person (focused around a man named Garvey) as well as the up-close "I" of a little girl at the beginning of the narrative. The narratives merge, and the effect of piecing

together details gave me the sense of prickling nervousness. I knew what was coming because it had already come, the end at the beginning, and I was afraid. I didn't want to keep reading, but I had to, like an onlooker at an accident scene: driving by, hands over my eyes, but fingers spread so I could peek at the carnage. I didn't want to see it, but I couldn't look away. That's the way I felt while reading most of the stories.

It was only in the aftermath of reading that I could focus on the artistry, the realistic details, sharp and crisp: "Mom was a realtor who permed her hair and frizzed up the front into a ten-inch-high claw" ("The Chameleon") and "He carried his books in a green Jansport from the nineties that he'd picked up for three bucks, second hand at Deseret Industries ("Tabernacle of Flesh"). These characters, wearers of clothes and stylers of hair, emerge vivid and breathing on the page, wandering around familiar places I've been, like the landscape of the point of the mountain, and places so foreign that I would never venture there voluntarily, like the wilderness of a mountain cave. Immersed in the familiar and fantastic, I was a hesitant traveler, waiting for the darkness to fall on the characters. And it did. Sometimes it hurt, but other times I cheered. Heartbreak can be a five word question ("The Bigamist"), a profanity-littered dismissal ("Our Shared History"), or it can be a landslide ("Sasquatch"), heart failure ("Mr. America"), or a body that caves in on itself ("The Chameleon").

Imbued with resignation and the unflinching ability to look at the ambiguities in life, Freeze guides the reader on a gender journey fraught with pain and haunted by the absent presence of invisible men. Is the invisible man the predator? Or the prey? "Lone Wolf" asks this question, as does "Sasquatch," and the answer to both questions is yes. Freeze warns us that invisibility doesn't offer protection. Indeed, invisibility always predicts pain—pain for the men themselves, and pain for those around them. In "Mr. America," Freeze tells us "men hold their arms, trying to massage out all the hurt" (160), and that emerges as the central idea around which all these stories gather. "They are all under

a tremendous amount of pressure. They try to hide it with prepared statements, with dazzling outfits, with full-Nelsons and banter and worn boots and t-shirts and opinions. But these men can crack. You've seen it happen. It will break your heart" (154).

The women who populate Freeze's stories are often heroic, concerned far more about the survival of their children than for any man struggling along in their wake. They cannot carry the baggage for the men in their landscape, so sometimes the men fall behind—abandoned, alone, invisible, an absent presence that haunts the women's lives (literally, in "The Bigamist"). Women in this world can be so other, so unknowable that they are literally monsters, like the Ice Woman and Sasquatch, or they can be as familiar as the widow you think you know in your ward ("The Bigamist").

By the end of the last story, the women have evolved, from the high-pitched sing-song voice of the little girl in "Duplex" to the invincible Ice Woman who moans and demands while giving birth. In this instance, the invisible man stands to the side, irrelevant, hurt, and full of mistrust in her moment of triumph (177).

And yet the men's invisibility shapes the women's lives, their choices, their pain. The men may feel irrelevant, but their absence impacts the women's lives, causing them to change course and adapt while leaving holes and pockmarks in their souls.

There is enough pain to go around. But the women seem to deal with it a bit better, or maybe it's just that Freeze gives us the inside of the men's emotions, a part that most fiction leaves off the page. Frankly, for me, as a woman with no brothers and a mother of four daughters, I've never pondered the vulnerability of men: the side effects, the risks, and the dangers when confronted with women. Seeing inside was an uncomfortable revelation.

By the end, my hands were no longer over my eyes, and I was appreciative of the nuance in the journey through both Mormon and secular territory. Anyone who ventures into this countryside with Freeze as a

guide should know that they will not emerge with sure answers and easy denouements. Instead, you will walk into dark places that are safe (a Sasquatch's den) and familiar places (BYU campus, I-15) that will haunt you long after you've put down the book. When the penetrating gaze of the cover model is hidden from your view, obscured and pressed against other books on the shelf, you will no longer be an intruder. Instead, you might become the girl, glaring with dismay at the implications of interactions between genders. Or maybe you'll be the invisible man, wondering why camouflage doesn't offer safety. In the moments between your everyday life and to-do list, your mind may catch on a detail, a sentence, a phrase, and you'll reconsider what nuances you may have missed the first time.

Speaking for Herself

Ashley Mae Hoiland. *One Hundred Birds Taught Me to Fly: The Art of Seeking God.* Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2016. 212 pp. Paperback: $11.92. ISBN: 9780842529921.

Reviewed by Glen Nelson

One Hundred Birds Taught Me to Fly: The Art of Seeking God is a collection of short missives—poems, essays, and autobiographical sketches—grouped loosely and thematically into thirteen sections and an epilogue. Ashley Mae Hoiland is the author/illustrator of three self-published children's books, a contributor to a collection of essays, *Fresh Courage Take: New Directions by Mormon Women* (Signature Books, 2015), a blogger (under the name ashmae) for *By Common Consent,* and the creator of a collection of sixty (trading or flash) cards of notable women in history, *We Brave Women* (Kickstarter, 2015).

Ultimately, the publisher does Hoiland a disservice by setting readers' expectations for *One Hundred Birds Taught Me to Fly* at sky-high levels. A florid and overreaching foreword by Kristin L. Matthews compares the text to (merely): Donne, Milton, Bradstreet, Yeats, and Bunyan, and to twentieth-century writers of distinction, particularly women writers. Further, the book's front matter begins with fifteen blurbs of praise by some of the most significant names in Mormon letters today. They employ vocabulary of superlatives and make claims for Hoiland's book as a work of historic importance. But there is little in Hoiland's book to suggest she aspires to such loftiness. It is a modest book—a personal, open, heartfelt, frank, and gentle book—published in the Neal A. Maxwell Institute's Living Faith series. Its daring comes from candid explorations that could be generalized with this question: what is a person in the LDS Church to do right now regarding an internal battle of belief and nonbelief?

Hoiland goes to great lengths to establish an authorial voice that speaks only for herself. The book is almost entirely free of "shoulds" or generalizations of any kind or, for that matter, direct references to Church policy and pronouncements. This is an account of a young mother trying to make sense of shifting internal foundations. "The weight of having to believe every thread of my Mormonism felt too heavy to bear," she writes (105); still, she resists the word "crisis" regarding her faith: "I could no longer give my spiritual questions and wanderings the name of 'crisis.' I could not continue pelting my own sincere heart with stones of shame and guilt because I did not believe perfectly, or understand perfectly, or even sustain a constant desire to do either of those things" (106). She adds, "Not a crisis now—just my story, the surprising story that was one of faith all along" (108).

At its best—in the stories of her sister Sage, who left the Church nearly ten years ago; her brother Dane, who is punched by his missionary companion and who ultimately falls into drug addiction; and her husband, Carl, whose homeless father arranges for the young boy

to sleep in the cab of his truck in an LDS temple parking lot so he can wake up amid the morning shadows of holiness—Hoiland shows a deft and graceful hand when writing about people, including herself, whom she knows intimately. The description of her husband's gradual integration into an accepting church community and his own self-acceptance in college is simply beautiful. She writes exquisitely about being in nature. Particularly when she creates heightened poetic images that underscore grander metaphors, Hoiland's prose shines, such as the poetic description of her husband's childhood toys after the Willamette Valley Flood of 1996, with "plastic arms sticking up out of the mud" (47).

Not all of the poetics land equally well. The title of the volume comes from an essay about the author's missionary experience in Uruguay: "On Easter all the children built kites out of sticks and tissue paper, and we sat on a front lawn watching them all rising into the sky, colored and cobbled out of the simplest things their world could afford them—one hundred birds teaching me to fly" (53). There are times in the book when the imagery is forced or tired, the lessons to be learned a bit obvious, the moralizing too convenient, and all of it wrapped up too neatly. Occasionally, cultural insensitivities and descriptions of the disadvantaged feel almost exploitative; there are scattered taste issues. But for a reader facing any of the struggles outlined in the book, Hoiland offers some templates of calm: "Over the last years I have done the work of unbinding my heart. Unraveling the threads that I thought it needed bound so tightly to stay good. I spent years in fear of where my heart might go if I untethered it. Fear that it would run from holiness and God and sacred things if I simply let it wander and explore. Fear that it might question itself beyond retention or lose its grip on awe" (98).

In one passage, the author writes about a Sunday, while pregnant, when she decided to stay home from worship services. It is a simple and brief story, if personally momentous: "and the memory of those

three hours is my saving grace at times" (130). She has given herself permission to create her own mode of worship, her own parameters. "I have discovered holiness in the exercise of abandoning my own world to enter the sacred lands of my children," she writes (135). She finds in the journals of Emmeline B. Wells a validation for doubt. She notes a diminishment, after her missionary service, of a connection to God. She writes tenderly about gay men she has dated and loved. Her life is as messy as any reader's. Her metaphor of children playing in clutter is apt for the author's spiritual state. She is content (even relieved) to enjoy it this way, and the implication is that a perfectly clean house with kids in it is not the life she wants; ditto religion.

The key metaphor in the book is the recounting of the gospel story found in St. Mark, in which people cut a hole in the roof above the Savior and lower an ailing friend into the assembled throng: "When I think of these people climbing on top of the roof while carrying their friend on his sickbed, about to dig a hole and interrupt a large crowd—not to mention the most important and sought-after man in the city—I wonder if they hesitated. I wonder if they thought they should turn back, that it was just a silly idea. But then, I marvel at their bravery—breaking a hole in that roof and sending their friend right down where he landed at Jesus's feet" (141–42).

To the extent the author wants a seat at the table in today's evolving Mormon dialogue, this is her salvo. For a loving cause, she is asking, can we interrupt the standard proceedings of the faith and be honest with each other? Can real life displace the idealized life in our discourse?

I can imagine many readers craving this exact point of view. She is persuasive and disarming. I also think she is guileless and sincere.

The book could be better. As described in the text, the life of a young mother of two does not yet provide the time to expand on thoughts, to ruminate without coming to simple conclusions, to write more poetry than simply poetically. The Post-it note format of the book suggests a lack of time and energy to make it cohesive and

deeper, narratively. One could say the same about the drawings that illustrate the book. Her skills are color and observation, and the book is sometimes reduced to simple lines, so to speak—at least, that is the slack I want to cut her.

I sympathize. As a young stay-at-home writer dad, I once approached Claudia Bushman for literary advice. How is it possible, I asked her in frustration, enviously, that she managed to raise a large family, pursue her education, conduct original research, publish numerous books, and keep a high-octane household humming? Her reply: "Make those ten minutes count."

By all appearances, that is what Hoiland is doing. She is juggling it all, doing good, trying to figure it all out, and generating poetry and prose and pictures that aim sincerely to help others do the same. Kudos to her. Yes, the book feels fragmented, but I can't help but think she will be proud of it in years to come, and a reader will be happy to have read it now . . . perhaps more than happy.

Toward the end of *One Hundred Birds Taught Me to Fly,* Hoiland tells the story of running a half marathon. She is concerned that she will not be able to make it to the finish line and, seeing a stranger in the distance, she decides to run alongside her. Wordlessly, each encourages, calms, paces, and pushes the other. "We crossed the finish line together, and then upon stopping we turned and hugged tightly, sweat dripping down our necks and backs. She said, 'I could not have done this without you'" (152). I have to wonder whether years from now, there will be a reader who approaches Hoiland and repeats the same sentiment regarding Mormon belief: *I could not have done this without you.*

A Candid and Dazzling Conversation

Patrick Madden. *Sublime Physick: Essays.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. 244 pp. Hardcover: $24.95. ISBN: 9780803239845.

Reviewed by Joe Plicka

Patrick Madden's second book of collected essays, following 2010's *Quotidiana* (which won an award from the Association for Mormon Letters and was a finalist for the PEN Center USA Literary Award), bears the mark of a writer hitting his stride. All the usual adjectives apply: the essays are at times witty, profound, charming, moving, playful (even cheeky), and wise. As anyone who has hung around a creative writing classroom knows by now, personal essays are grounded in a carefully curated friendship between reader and writer, a dialogue, an intimacy—a formulation probably most plainly expressed (recently) by Phillip Lopate in the introduction to his seminal anthology *The Art of the Personal Essay.* It is this quality of friendship, of candid and dazzling conversation, that engages and entices me as a reader throughout *Sublime Physick*'s dozen entries. When Madden laments the inescapable arithmetic of time in "Miser's Farthings"—"the vast part of life is absorbed into the unremembered whole" (80)—I nod and sigh in unison. When he ruminates on the limits and value of his aspirations, his efforts, his art—"But maybe this is literature: to say what has already been said, or will be said long after, in words (even translated words) that sing" (58)—in "In Media Vita," I thank him for giving me the words to understand something I have so often felt. It is the strange and almost embarrassing alchemy of fine literature: we commune and enter into prized confidence with people who are often distant strangers and may even, in some cases, be dead. (Note: Patrick Madden is very much alive and teaching in the English Department at Brigham Young University in Provo. He is also,

full disclosure, someone I know personally, though I know him much better through his books than in "real life.")

On his stroll through memory and mind, Madden has invited along many other amiable and compelling friends: indeed, a great pleasure of this book is Madden's rich compilation of relevant passages from other (mostly) writers, (mostly) essayists, spanning the centuries and providing dense fodder for his own essaying. As many a blurb writer has pointed out, Madden is indeed a scholar of the form and combines the expert's frighteningly vast knowledge of the field with the warm love and exuberance of a fan. He is the proprietor of the website quotidiana.org which is, among other things, an "online compendium of 420 public-domain essays." Both Madden and the above-mentioned Lopate (along with countless other essayists) have pledged their allegiance to sixteenth-century Frenchman and godfather of the contemplative personal essay, Michel de Montaigne (you can read fifty of his essays right now on quotidiana.org), who famously wrote, "I have never seen a greater monster or miracle in the world than myself." Madden continues in this vein, harnessing the energy of both the miraculous and the monstrous actions, reactions, and ideas that form the contours of our mostly banal and ordinary lives. (Admittedly, I think Madden is stronger on miracles than on monsters, but this is not a failing as much as perhaps a function of being a middle-aged American Mormon father, something I can certainly identify with.)

Montaigne makes many appearances in these essays, as exemplar and standard-bearer, and I think there is a decent case to be made that Madden is, for all intents and purposes, the Mormon Montaigne (he will probably hate and deny that moniker and I don't blame him; forget I ever said it). The point being, however, that while Madden is not usually concerned with highlighting his Mormon-ness, he is exactly the kind of writer that Mormons need right now—someone whose interests, questions, and concerns, not to mention audience, transcend sectarian cultures and doctrines, but who still represents a recognizably

spiritual point of view, maintains hope in Christian ideas and ideals, and cultivates an openness and humility with regard to things like family, forgiveness, tragedy, friendship, creativity, and redemption. Madden is a seeker, a collector of fragments, and a generous companion in print, as his form practically dictates; those wanting a preacher may need to head elsewhere.

All this may sound very serious indeed, but it is vital to note that *Sublime Physick* is a fun and funny book. It is full of photographs and illustrations that add texture and depth to the prose as well as give readers that extra little connection to their capacious host. Madden is an encyclopedia of popular music and he has an uncanny ability to make offhand quotes and references by Eddie Money and John Lennon, as well as obscure rappers and one-hit wonders, a seamless part of his tapestry. He delights in tinkering with computer programs, in visiting psychics, in riding elevators. He analyzes court cases, advertisements, phone conversations. He isn't afraid of the pun or the parenthetical. He's also not afraid of the long essay, and I will notify you now about the penultimate essay in the book, "Independent Redundancy," that runs a staggering ninety pages (hard to place in a literary journal or magazine, as one can imagine). It is also one of my favorite essays in the book, a brisk and highly entertaining exploration of how we perceive originality and influence in art and culture, and how creation is more often than not recombination and repetition.

I look forward to sharing these essays with my own writing students and showing them what is possible in the shrewd and flexible essay form.

An Honorable Testament to a Legacy

Gregory A. Prince. *Leonard Arrington and the Writing of Mormon History.* Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016. 540 pp. Hardcover: $39.95. ISBN: 9781607814795.

Reviewed by Dallas Robbins

Upon completing *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* in 2005, Greg Prince was uncertain of what his next project would be. After speaking in the Logan Tabernacle, he was approached by Susan Arrington Madsen, a daughter of the iconic Mormon historian. Susan invited Greg to breakfast the next day to discuss whether he would be interested in writing her father's biography. Eleven years later, readers now can enjoy the fruits and labor born out of that morning conversation.

What makes writing a biography of Leonard Arrington so irresistible is that his personal and research papers were made available to the public in the fall of 2001 at the Utah State University Merrill-Cazier Library. His papers by any standard are enormous, an embarrassment of riches for the researcher, 319 linear feet of material, described once by Leonard to his friend Carol Lynn Pearson as "a diary of perhaps fifty large notebooks, the most sensitive part of which is that kept from 1972 to 1982 when I was in the Church Office Building. I record many conversations, perhaps even some with you! They also include, besides books and pamphlets, magazines, and other published material, a large number of typescripts of things I have copied, or things others have copied and given me Xeroxes or carbons of" (460). Also there are the letters Leonard wrote to his wife during his school and military years and weekly letters he would send his children throughout his life. In addition, Greg Price conducted numerous interviews to write the story of "arguably the most important figure in twentieth-century Mormon historiography" (ix).

That sentiment that Leonard Arrington is the "most important figure" in Mormon historiography is one that I have thought of on occa-

sion when the debate or discussion arises, but the longer that Leonard is no longer with us, I think it may be taken for granted that he indeed is so. The fact that Greg Prince never again refers to this laudatory label for the rest of book is a testament to the obvious strength of the story that he tells, because as the life of Leonard unfolds over the course of more than five hundred pages it becomes so blatantly self-evident that to bring it up once again is an insult to the reader. And in the spirit that Leonard Arrington possessed, insulting the reader would be embarrassing in the least and a sin at the most.

But starting with such a high note of praise from the beginning, a reader may fear that this work may border on hagiography, which, considering the subject's own pursuit of honest, fair, and professional history, would be an unfortunate irony. Thankfully, Prince does not do this but exemplifies the "warts and all" style that addresses both Leonard's own strengths and weaknesses. Prince paints a portrait of an optimistic personality that may at times have been oblivious about how to navigate corporate or bureaucratic relationships and of Arrington's own personal struggles with faith and reason, most problematically with Book of Mormon historicity. Prince even goes at length discussing Leonard's use of ghostwriters and the mixed quality of his historical output over the years, including a very strong chapter on the weaknesses of his later masterpiece, *Brigham Young: American Moses.* One is reminded that, in spite of Arrington's amazing influence, research, and generosity, he was not perfect any more than the historical figures he loved to write about.

The story of Leonard Arrington and his years as Church Historian has been told often by colleagues and history buffs and for long enough that it has become a morality tale that prepares the budding young Mormon historian of the challenges she or he will face while writing fair and honest history. Leonard's vision was simple:

> Is there any area of the history of the Church and its leaders which deservers being cloaked in half-truth or consigned to chilly silence?

> Our office has the conviction that any aspect of the history of the Church can be discussed frankly and analyzed in depth at least among mature scholars. . . . As long as the narration and analysis is kept within perspective it ultimately will be a contribution toward spiritual uplift and understanding. Inevitably, interpretations on some points will differ among those committed to the same standards of research, religion, rationality, and revelation, but the differences should be occasions for reflection and reassessment rather than retrenchment or fear. (177–78)

Unfortunately, this vision wasn't shared by all. The story of Leonard's calling to Church Historian in 1972 and the eventual (if not inevitable) "release" in 1982 is a tragic story that has taken on mythic proportions. But in reading Prince's work, one is reminded that it wasn't all just good guys versus bad guys; it was always more complex, the tensions rooted in the motives of real people on both sides of the aisle making modest strides in writing history they believed would be in the best interest of the Church and the Saints. In this struggle we see certain apostles, primarily Mark E. Petersen, Ezra Taft Benson, and Boyd K. Packer, as the antagonists to Leonard's plans of what Mormon history should be. But we also see other General Authorities who, if not vocal, were more sympathetic and aligned with Leonard's strengths, such as Harold B. Lee, Spencer W. Kimball, even Bruce R. McConkie (who supported Leonard's desire that Church History staff publications should not be subject to the correlation committee). I suspect that the full breadth of this struggle among differing factions and personalities is difficult to capture on the page, though in the chapter "What Went Wrong" Prince has probably done the best analysis so far, exploring many ideological, social, corporate, and generational factors that turned "Camelot" into a fated story with only one possible outcome.

Even though Prince's book is more than just about the "Camelot" years, they roughly make up almost half of the book. They are incisive, capturing the promise and hope of those early years, along with the

grinding frustration of cancelled projects, conflicting plans, mixed messages, and eventual exile to the BYU campus under different auspices. Even though I have read this story before in Leonard's autobiography, revisiting it again with Prince's broad research on display, I truly felt the immense injustice that was brought down on such a truly beautiful and genuine man. Leonard was always an optimistic person, approaching situations and people with the best intentions and a generous spirit. To see him endure the bureaucratic and authorial gauntlet he did for so many years is profoundly tragic. That the Church now is more forthright with its history is ironic in that the fruits now available—the Joseph Smith Papers Project, the Gospel Topics Essays, etc.— can all be traced back to the soil Leonard planted and tended to over forty years ago. He was a man ahead of his time who saw the future more clearly than the myopic authorities who complicated or squashed his projects so many years ago.

Though many readers may gravitate toward those chapters that recount Leonard's years as Church Historian, as a reader and admirer of Leonard from afar, I was more gripped and delighted by the personal stories that Prince has put together. To begin, we have several chapters that delve into Leonard's family, early life, college years, and his service during World War II in Italy, along with his courtship and marriage to Grace. An entire chapter dives into the development of his work that put him on the map of Mormon history: *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900*. As a dedicated scholar of economics, Arrington developed into a historian, despite never having taught a single history course in his career at Utah State University. Much is given to his early relationships with books, scholars, colleagues, and friends that contributed to his development as a historian who was both "faithful" to his church while at the same time upholding the highest standards of professional and academic history. There are even personal stories that reveal the character behind

the historian. For example, Leonard's first wife, Grace, was not LDS, though it didn't seem to bother him in the least. In fact, while living in Logan he would rotate his church attendance, one week attending his LDS ward and the next with a Protestant congregation, in order to make Grace comfortable in the land of the Saints. She later converted to the LDS Church in spite of Leonard's not seeming to worry about or convince her that she should do so.

Some other character-revealing moments for Leonard include when, as Church Historian, a member of his staff, Maureen Ursenbach, got married and soon after was expecting her first child. Church employment policy was firm that any new expecting mother would have their employment terminated. Leonard and Maureen both fought this policy, which made its way through the Church's legal counsel and eventually forced the Church to eliminate the policy for good and later provided women with several weeks of maternity leave after which they were welcome to resume employment.

The last chapters in the book cover the last decades of Leonard's life as a man who always stood above the fray of conflicts. Many moments in Church history are covered, recounting Leonard's involvement and/or commentary about the things that weighed on his mind, such as the Sonia Johnson excommunication, the 1978 priesthood "revelation," the Mark Hoffman bombings and forgeries, the September Six, plus other events too numerous to list here. And we get many personal struggles that he faced in his later years, such as the death of his first wife, his fear of retaliation for publishing his autobiography, his declining health, and even some personal angst he felt toward certain Church practices that he detailed in a list in his journal. In addition to all of this, there are numerous personal moments from his life that surprised me, delighted me, or usually both and are well worth the price of admission.

Leonard Arrington's legacy is known and appreciated by many. But there are still many who are not aware of his contribution to Mormonism. Fortunately, Greg Prince does a wonderful job in making that story

interesting, relevant, funny, gripping, tragic, and consequential for us today. It is a story that even those who are familiar with it may lose sight of, and a biography like this reminds us to think on it more often. But more than Leonard's influence in Mormon history, it was the personal moments shared in this biography that have given me a much deeper appreciation for the man and person that he was. Leonard was truly a great historian but also a great man, and the world of Mormonism is immeasurably blessed to have had his influence and contribution. Prince's biography is an honorable testament to that legacy.

"The Dean of Mormon History": One Viewpoint

Gregory A. Prince. *Leonard Arrington and the Writing of Mormon History.* Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016. 540 pp. Hardcover: $39.95. ISBN: 978-1607814795.

Reviewed by Dennis L. Lythgoe

Greg Prince published *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* in 2005 to mostly critical acclaim. His study of Mormon historian Leonard J. Arrington is patterned after that work in its style, its largely undigested interpretations, and even its large format size. It did not matter that he never personally knew McKay since the latter was a famed Mormon prophet, but it makes a significant difference in his Arrington book that he never really knew his genial subject. He only met him casually at unspecified Mormon history meetings.

Although Arrington was extremely familiar to Mormon historians and Mormon history buffs, he was not universally known to Mormons in the same way as President McKay. That point is of major significance

for Arrington followers who knew him to be a historian of the first rank, a genuine intellectual, and an affable, generous human being.

Prince correctly makes much of the fact that the "Dean of Mormon History" was also an avid mentor to numerous aspiring Mormon scholars. In fact, I was mentored by him. Yet Prince cavalierly demotes Arrington by his description of his numerous writings on Mormon history as "mediocre" and even "abysmal" to read. Astonishingly, this includes his hallmark book, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830–1900,* originally published in 1958 by Harvard University Press, and *Brigham Young: American Moses,* published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1985.

Both books received high marks from scholars of western American history and were ardently enjoyed by rank-and-file Mormon readers. The first book permanently changed the public view of Mormonism as a field of study worthy of pursuing; it may have led to newly-organized departments of religion and endowed Mormon chairs in several universities. The second book was the first objective and scholarly analysis of Brigham Young, the colonizer and pioneer, written in the twentieth century. It has not yet been equaled in the twenty-first century. Previous studies of Young were either viciously anti-Mormon or embarrassingly apologetic. Each Arrington book has been widely used in academic courses in Mormon and western history and by scholars who followed him with their own appraisals.

That Prince refers to Arrington's published work as "mostly ghost-written" is stunning, disingenuous, and actually insulting. Toward the end of his book, Prince tries to justify such a description by arguing that while Arrington was LDS Church Historian, he utilized large chunks of material written by his scholarly staff that went unattributed, even though Church authorities insisted that his name be the only one included on his books. Prince also glosses over Arrington's formidable obstacles in writing during those years because of his copious duties as an administrator.

Prince calls Arrington "naïve" in his dealings with LDS General Authorities, as if to imply that they took advantage of him by going through a back door to overrule his Historical Department decisions. Actually, he often stood up to General Authorities. Prince is dismissive of Arrington's talks to Mormon groups, alleging that his actor son, James, would coach him how to make a gentle but clever point, i.e. "Just remove your glasses, lean over the podium and say, 'I've been through the archives. I've seen it all! There's nothing to worry about.'" I don't doubt the quotation, but I don't think Arrington needed coaching. Prince may not have heard the talks. They were filled with rich anecdotes that made his oral style lively and entertaining.

As a good friend for many years, I witnessed his charismatic speaking ability and candid approach that also spilled over to the LDS study group to which he and I both belonged. He always conveyed his opinions of Mormon history and his differences with Church leaders with conviction and his signature humor.

Although Prince often uses Arrington's candid diaries and frank letters, he does not always use them effectively. He conducted a variety of interviews with people Arrington only knew casually, but he allows their sometimes confusing views to dilute the primary sources. Some of the extraneous opinions expressed in the interviews appear to be apocryphal rather than stories "from the horse's mouth."

I look forward to the promised publication of Arrington's actual diaries to speak for themselves.

The Prince book fails to do justice to the brilliant man I knew.

Old Words, New Work: Reclamation and Remembrance

John Russell. *The Mormoness; Or, The Trials of Mary Maverick: A Narrative of Real Events.* Edited and annotated by Michael Austin and Ardis E. Parshall. The Mormon Image in Literature. Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016 [1853]. 114 pp. Paperback: $12.95. ISBN: 9781589585072.

Alfreda Eva Bell. *Boadicea; The Mormon Wife: Life-Scenes in Utah.* Edited and annotated by Michael Austin and Ardis E. Parshall. The Mormon Image in Literature. Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2016 [1855]. 151 pp. Paperback: $15.95. ISBN: 9781589585669.

Nephi Anderson. *Dorian: A Peculiar Edition with Annotated Text & Scholarship.* Edited by Eric W. Jepson. Annotated by Mason Allred, Jacob Bender, Scott Hales, Blair Dee Hodges, Eric W. Jepson, Sarah C. Reed, and A. Arwen Taylor. El Cerrito, Calif.: Peculiar Pages, 2015 [1921]. 316 pp. Paperback: $21.99. ISBN: 9780991189236.

Reviewed by Jenny Webb

The continual rising interest in all things Mormon, whether they be historical, cultural, social, doctrinal, or even theological, has led to a number of interesting publication projects. The texts gathered in this review represent a particular focus within this broader interest: the recovery and re-examination of the various historical forms of the "Mormon novel." The books on their own are not necessarily remarkable. They hold some significance as examples of a particular genre or a particular thematic interest, but their real value today lies in their ability to provide insight into the various ways in which the emergent Mormon religion was culturally received and aesthetically appropriated.

On the surface, the two series represented here appear fairly similar. Each takes a text that, for a variety of reasons, has languished in recent publication history and essentially been unavailable or difficult to locate in a decent edition. The original text is carefully and faithfully reproduced in a modern typesetting, and the editors provide a series of explanatory annotations along with various critical components such as a historical introduction to the text, appendices with additional contemporary texts provided for comparison, and in some cases, critical essays on the author or work itself. And yet there are distinct differences between the focus of Kofford's The Mormon Image in Literature series and that of Peculiar Pages: the scope of a "Mormon work." Compare the series descriptions:

> The Mormon Image in Literature reprints important literary works by and about Mormons—from the sensational anti-polygamy books and dime novels of the Civil War era to the first attempts of Mormon writers to craft a regional literature in their Great Basin kingdom. Each volume contains a critical introduction, helpful annotations, and multiple appendices that enlighten and enliven the text. These volumes have been designed for both Mormon and non-Mormon readers who want to understand the cultural importance of Mormonism during the first Latter-day Saint century.

> Peculiar Pages presents new editions of vital Mormon texts alongside overdue critical analysis. These carefully edited volumes bring deserving artistic works back to public attention.

Questions of genre (literary texts? how does one define a "Mormon text"?), authorship (Mormon authors? or authors writing about Mormons?), and audience (both ostensibly hedge their bets toward an expanded audience—essentially anyone interested—but their mutual emphasis on creating some sort of critical text indicates an underlying academic orientation) provide a sense as to the underlying complexities involved in reprinting and updating past texts for modern consumption. The editors involved in each series are well aware of these challenges, and are to be commended for their efforts here. While the Church Historian's Press has

certainly undertaken the most visible republishing effort of Mormon documents in recent years, both Kofford and Peculiar Pages demonstrate the breadth and depth of the available field. These texts may not possess the same doctrinal heft as the documents in the Joseph Smith Papers, but their ability to demonstrate a particular cultural reception of and response to popular Mormonism is significant in many ways, not the least of which is a demonstration of the reception of these theologies from both within and without the boundaries of Mormonism itself.

In *The Mormoness* and *Boadicea,* editors Michael Austin and Ardis E. Parshall have taken great pains to provide an informed, thorough, and yet accessible introduction to each volume. Both novels are written by non-Mormons, and both relate the story of a Mormon heroine battling a distinctively Mormon trial—persecution and polygamy, respectively. Austin and Parshall's helpful contextualization allows the reader to understand the important differences between the two projects: while it is tempting to lump these novels together along with other early novels anxious to capitalize on the cultural otherness of the Mormons, the approach and methodology of the original authors as outlined by Austin and Parshall lie at opposite ends of the literary spectrum.

John Russell, author of *The Mormoness,* was a thoughtful, educated man whose approach to the topic ultimately sought to illustrate the underlying Christian impulses of forgiveness and mercy as integral to the Mormon experience. When his heroine serves the man who murdered her family, she is both fully Mormon and fully Christian (xv), and in this conceptualization of his heroine Russell displays a sensitivity and nuance regarding Mormonism that would not surface again in popular literature for many years.

On the other hand, Austin and Parshall explain how Alfreda Eva Bell (a pseudonym for, they argue, Arthur R. Orton) wrote *Boadicea* quickly with an eye to potential financial profits rather than as a factual depiction of polygamy in the lives of the early Utah Mormons. The novel seeks thrills—it most closely aligns with early efforts at sensational

crime drama—and its twists and turns demonstrate the text's "curious place in the history of both publishing and Mormonism. . . . Its author has figured out how to make a lot of money by presenting sensational crimes as true stories to an unsophisticated audience" (xvii).

The distance here between Russell and Bell demonstrates both the challenge of this series—disparate approaches bound together by the happenstance of historical proximity abound!—and the value in its approach. By placing these early works on Mormonism together, Austin and Parshall illustrate in their conception of this ongoing series the wide variety with which Mormonism itself was received within the early American cultural context. For some, the strange religion provided an opportunity to reflect upon the tenets of religious faith, examining and ultimately expanding the borders of Christianity itself. For others, the very otherness of the Mormon experience proved a plentiful site for profitable entertainment. These responses, which I will broadly characterize as the religious and the economic, are at root fundamentally American. They display the quintessentially American modes of response to what was, at that point, an essentially American religion, and the interplay between product and context is fascinating at our present historical remove.

This same interplay is at work in Nephi Anderson's coming-of-age novel *Dorian,* although in a decidedly more limited context. The editor of the present edition, Eric W. Jepson, describes Anderson as "the grandfather of Mormon literature," calling *Dorian* "his best work" (iv). As a Mormon author, Anderson is clearly coming to his text from a distinctly different place than that of Russell and Bell (note the nearly seventy-year span between the earlier works and this later work as well). And as an author, Anderson is clearly writing for his contemporary Mormon audience: his vocabulary, his emphasis on doctrinal speculation/philosophizing at the expense of the plot, and his ultimate laser-like focus on conventions of redemption—each points toward a Mormon audience sympathetic to the protagonist's difficulties. Young Dorian struggles to

learn and think, ultimately wanting to produce some kind of systematic synthesis of scientific and religious thought. Along the way, he negotiates the pitfalls of love, loss, and forgiveness, emerging as heroic due to his ability to accept his love, a "fallen woman."

In some ways, the historical remove seems even farther in *Dorian* than in *The Mormoness* or *Boadicea,* simply because, as a Mormon reading a novel by a Mormon about a Mormon, I approached the text with muffled expectations of identification and recognition. And there were certainly lines that provoked thought. For example, the mentor Uncle Zed characterizes the Doctrine and Covenants as "the most wonderful love story ever written" (38). While the continuing text makes it clear that Uncle Zed provides this assessment due to the revelation on eternal marriage, as a singular assertion, the line proves potent: What *would* it mean to read the Doctrine and Covenants as a love story? But there were also plenty of moments where the cultural recognition was painful. For example, when Dorian's female friend Carlia asks him about a sermon Uncle Zed gave earlier, she says "Try to tell me, Dorian. I need to know. I'm such a dunce" (81). Frankly, my reaction to this seemingly stereotypical depiction of gender was a literally-out-loud "Ugh!"—admittedly a specific modern reaction due to my own beliefs, but it is telling: I'm the kind of generalist Mormon reader (trained in literature, but not history) curious enough to pick up the book, but also a bit unsettled at this literary heritage.

From this reaction, it's no surprise that the argument Jepson constructs through his editorship of this edition faces several difficulties. First, Jepson makes the case that Anderson was himself an important author worth considering in his own right due to his efforts at cultivating a Mormon literature. And second, the case is also made that *Dorian* itself represents the high point of this effort due to its attempts at what I would term a literary Mormon theology. Jepson addresses these issues both in his own introduction, but also in his construction of the volume as a critical text: there are full notes on each chapter, a series of six critical essays by contemporary readers and scholars (which do a good job of taking up topics raised by Anderson and placing them within the

modern critical discourses of canon, gender, economics, science, etc.), and two further essays by Anderson himself, "A Plea for Fiction" and "Purpose in Fiction." The appendix provides deleted material curated by Scott Hales as well as contemporary notices of *Dorian*'s arrival in Mormon publications. And it is difficult to imagine work on the historical emergence of a Mormon literary tradition that would not take up Anderson in some way. For this work, then, this edition of *Dorian* provides ample orientation to Anderson, his aesthetic, his thematic approach, and, of course, *Dorian* itself.

It was impossible to read these three works without noting the various methodological and editorial choices. And there were distinct advantages and disadvantages that became apparent with each approach. Austin and Parshall displayed a certain facility working within the historical approach that was not as readily visible in Jepson's volume. At the same time, Jepson's efforts to provide not only historical contextualization, but also a framework for further literary interpretation gives the reader ready access for reflection upon the themes and motifs developed by Anderson throughout the novel. The actual text of each novel has been reproduced faithfully, though I have a slight preference for Austin and Parshall's method of providing corrected spelling or punctuation in square brackets when the original contains an error. There were several instances in *Dorian* where it was unclear if the typo originated with Anderson or Jepson—for the record, they were all Anderson and were simply being reproduced as promised.

Luckily, I'm not being asked to pick a favorite, and the conceptual differences between the two series display the strength, breadth, and available intellectual space in this emerging field. For all their differences, the volumes here produced something in me that I had not anticipated: genuine excitement.

There is something going on in these texts, regardless of author, plot, or compositional intent. Together, they begin to paint a picture of the landscape of literary Mormonism with its interior reflections, exterior observations, and general evidence of multiplicity. There is no

one historical Mormon experience, literary or otherwise, and these texts readily demonstrate this fact. But there is a certain Mormon textuality that emerges from these pages: experimental, provocative, heartfelt, and profoundly human. It is this essential humanity that lies at the root of Mormonism both as a lived religion, but also as a cultural experience within the larger narrative of American history. The fact that we are at a vantage point from which we can reflect on Mormonism's broader cultural impact in a specific national context demonstrates the ways in which our current assumptions surrounding Mormonism itself are challenged by notions of national identity. Contemporary Mormonism exceeds national and cultural boundaries in ways that ultimately place these texts firmly within the historical past. They connect with a historical Mormonism precisely because, upon reflection, we realize how far we've come. The process of reflection initiated in each of these series is part of a central Mormon theological gesture: the turning of the hearts.

We turn toward those who came before us as we read their words with an eye to their historical moment and cultural context. We turn toward those who are coming after us as we recognize the changing attitudes in reception, circulation, and interpretation. We enact memory through a re-membering—a reconceptualization of the body of Christ as constituted by a multitude of members: fingers and toes, arms and legs, down to every hair on the head. These projects of textual reclamation resonate with Mormonism's foundational impulse to restore, and I cannot wait to see where they take us next.