

the passion that religion can evoke and the rights of readers to not be preached to. Regardless of the challenge, it does seem clear that authors owe it to young readers to broach what might be a sensitive topic in the name of portraying reality. Julie Berry and Jeff Zentner have ably and courageously done so in these books, and readers will find themselves in richly imagined and finely drawn worlds of authentic characters encountering thought-provoking dilemmas.

It is worth noting that here are two LDS authors who do not write about their own religious tradition, even though they write of struggles and crises that are real for LDS faithful, too. Writing about a minority faith could limit the appeal of these books, or it may be that Berry and Zentner don't want to be seen as proselyting for or being critical of their own faith. Patty Campbell, a scholar of religion in young adult literature, has suggested that these concerns often limit the presence of religion in books for a younger audience. In her work, she has also called for more work from writers with "religious literacy" who understand intimately the ways that young people wrestle with issues of faith and who can portray these honestly and sensitively. In the case of Julie Berry and Jeff Zentner, we have two writers who answer Campbell's call admirably and two characters in *Botille* and *Dill* who will resonate with readers young and old.



Just Saying

Stanton Harris Hall. *Just Seeing*. Self-published, 2016. 109 pp.

Reviewed by Mary Lythgoe Bradford

Stan Hall was one of *Dialogue's* most enthusiastic volunteers back in the '70s when I was its editor. We published some of his poetry then and were sorry when he moved back to his home turf in the Northwest. I

was therefore happy to see that he had continued to hone his poetic gift in his privately published collection *Just Seeing*. The quality of this work causes me to hope that it will be read beyond his family circle, extending even into a second volume, perhaps entitled *Just Saying*.

Hall is a poet on whom nothing is lost—whose gimlet eye misses little in nature or in human nature. His fine brush strokes recall the Japanese masters of the haiku. He is adept at sketching the place where nature meets its creator as it dreams of “taking the soul in hand / and twisting / like lime or sassafras / release the dry corona-white spirit / from the body’s moist darkness / the spirit freed / the child reunited” (50).

A geologist could do no better than Hall’s description of “Sandstone” and its slow sculpture of time’s hands on earth while asking the question: “Is destruction wrapped in the spiral lace / at our very center / transcending sediment / breeding true” (51)?

The collection is divided into three sections: the first, “So Close,” covers youth and family life; the second, “Looking Beyond,” and the third, “Seeing from the Known.” Altogether it constitutes a poet’s luminous biography beginning with “Looking East”—“East” being Idaho, the land of his birth, and moving to a description of the Sawtooth Range of the Rockies, where he “would go to be healed” (4). The poems recount his childhood, including the mother’s loss of a baby girl and his own beginning loss of his hearing, along with a moving tribute to his mother, with bows to friends and family. “Leaving you / leaves me wishing / I could hold you / like a small stone / in my pocket / an agate / velvet smooth and clear / to caress and hold / to sunlight / whenever longing starts” (35).

Hall goes on to examine the roots of faith, asking “why God prizes / even rewards / the broken heart” (4). He searches for an answer: Is it because he knows that “We caught in a world of opposites / will never inherit the power of creation / presumably that pinnacle of joy / if not built upon the solid rock of contrition” (40)? Moroni speaks: “And I, Moroni / deny not the Christ / therefore I wander” (42). Profound thinking in few words! In “Knowing and Doubting,” he declares that there is in doubt “a knowing suffused with burning fingers / and lingering death”

and because of that, “I still believe” (43). He delights in writing of the “boy Joseph” who kneels with a “simple question / but one of quantum significance” which is “the ultimate allegory of renewal” (54). The poet ends this section with a praise song to “The Word.”: “The words of the Torah, the Book of Mormon, and all the words of the prophets, where “we await night / and the songs of stars / singing the word / His word / Oh, praise Him” (56). The ancients joined poets and prophets—rightly so.

In his third section, Hall deals honestly with some of life’s most compelling problems. He declares that there is a “Place deep inside us / where the friend never treads / nor the mother or daughter / the priest / It’s the place that we are, neither feather nor star / . . . that we understand least” (63).

He moves into vivid word paintings of a perfect new moon “balanced on its reflected smile” (63) to the month of March “searching for / the tiny broken hillock / marking crocus advent / and spring” (67). He is equally adept at love songs, painting lovers in the light of a “Single Candle” with “the thigh’s hollow / in concave yellows / shadows moving / in sheltered union / time leaping through / moistened sparks” (82).

In “Sunstroke: Warming to Life,” the poet addresses the sun: “I feel you pushing out dark dreams / dark days and dark notions / I feel you in her breast molded to mine / the heart pushing heat to heat” (89). I wish I had said that!

Hall’s ability to paint word landscapes inspires me to compare him to the Japanese master Hiroshige, recently honored with an exhibit in Washington, DC. In a reviewer’s words: “He fixed for all time the shifting details and fleeting lives on this pathway through the floating world.”¹ This is also a fitting tribute to Stan Hall’s poetry.

1. Mark Jenkins, “Utagawa Hiroshige’s Vision Opened up the World for Everyday Japanese,” *Washington Post*, Nov. 3, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/goingoutguide/museums/utagawa-hiroshiges-vision-opened-up-the-world-for-everyday-japanese/2016/11/03/35c7de82-9baf-11e6-b3c9-f662adaa0048_story.html?utm_term=.1c36ae0f71f9.