

in her profile on *Mormon Scholars Testify*, “Questioning does not have to lead to divorce or mayhem.”<sup>3</sup> Clearly, for Nichols, compassion and understanding are essential elements of faith, especially when helping others to define theirs. *Pigs When They Straddle the Air* may not hold the answers, but it does, at least, ask the questions.



## The Fruit of Knowledge

Thomas F. Rogers. *Let Your Hearts and Minds Expand: Reflections on Faith, Reason, Charity, and Beauty*. Provo: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2016. 349 pp. Paperback: \$21.95. ISBN: 978-0-8425-2976-1.

*Reviewed by Mahonri Stewart*

As a book of short, religious, and academic non-fiction, Thomas F. Rogers’s *Let Your Hearts and Minds Expand* is extremely valuable to the Mormon intellectual community; but as a reflection of a devoted disciple and a soulful artist, it goes beyond even that to be authentically moving. In a modern world where spirituality and religious belief is a place of tension and contention, Rogers has written from his place of the faithful agitator—pushing our culture’s boundaries where needed and then turning around to help the Mormon community reach inward and pull the wagons around shared principles.

Working from that place of “proving contraries,” as Joseph Smith recommended, Rogers has often been put under scrutiny by the orthodox, but he has also been championed as a defender of the faith. He

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3. Julie J. Nichols, *Mormon Scholars Testify*, May 2011, <http://mormonscholarstestify.org/2445/julie-j-nichols>.

writes from an accumulation of vantage points—as a BYU professor, a playwright, a linguist, a historian, an LDS mission president in Russia, an activist, an apologist, a skeptic, a patriarch, a family man, an intellectual, a spiritualist, a man of nations, and a man of God—that are truly representative of the idea of proving contraries. Rogers weaves his far-flung—even at times contradictory—experiences into the unifying principles boiled down in the book’s subtitle and the mantra of the collection: “Reflections on Faith, Reason, Charity, and Beauty.”

Editors Jonathan Langford and Linda Hunter Adams have scoured Rogers’s very active and varied writing life and chosen from a huge spectrum of genres and subject matter. Langford and Adams had an eclectic literary cornucopia to choose from—essays, poems, reviews, personal letters, speeches, journal entries—of a rich and long lifetime of writing. Although that does make for a slightly cafeteria-like experience—you’re able to sample a little bit of this, a little bit of that—I, for one, have always enjoyed diversity on my plate.

For example, I enjoyed Rogers’s thoughtful analysis and reflection on Donna Hill’s classic biography on Joseph Smith, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (which was to Rogers in his day what Richard Bushman’s *Rough Stone Rolling* has been to many of this generation, in the way that it challenges preconceptions as it spiritually and intellectually nourishes). Reading *Let Your Hearts and Minds Expand* can be a little dizzying given the book’s wide-ranging, even scattered, sensibilities: “Letter to a Doubting Former Student,” “The Image of Christ in Russian Literature,” “Insights from a Patriarch’s Journal,” “Why the Book of Mormon is One of the World’s Best Books,” “Coping with Orthodoxy: The Honors Student Syndrome,” “An Insider’s View of the Missionary Training Center, 1993–1996,” “The Gospel of John as Literature,” or the devotional “Discovering Ourselves in Others.” Yet, again, that’s part of the collection’s adventurous charm and soul-searching openness.

However, as a dramatist, I was most drawn to his essays about his playwriting. Among his plays, *Huebener* and *Fire in the Bones* are the most famous, and classics of Mormon drama. When I edited *Saints on*

*Stage: An Anthology of Mormon Drama*, *Huebener* was one of the first plays I made sure was included, due to both its success and its influence.

I had first encountered *Huebener* when peers performed a scene at a BYU high school drama camp in 1995, and it made a distinct impression. When I later found a collection of Rogers's plays at the BYU bookstore, I immediately picked it up and have held onto the now badly time-worn, weathered—but treasured—volume ever since.

There are some strong corollaries between the historical protagonists in *Huebener* and *Fire in the Bones*—Helmuth Hübener and John D. Lee—and the stances that Rogers makes for himself in *Let Your Hearts and Minds Expand*. Both Hübener and Lee were deeply invested in Mormonism. In Hübener's case, he was willing to sacrifice his own life for his deeply held beliefs; in Lee's case, he was willing to sacrifice the lives of others. Their zealotry, however, made others around them wary, and officials within the Church eventually offered up both of them as scapegoats and sacrifices.

Helmuth Hübener was a fifteen-year-old Mormon boy in World War II Germany, where he and some fellow youthful compatriots fought against the Nazi influence with a propagandistic printing press hidden within the LDS meeting house. Unfortunately for him, his branch president was a Nazi, and someone within his branch reported on Hübener and his friends. Despite being one of the most diligent members in his branch, as well as one of its most intelligent and one of its most shining examples of integrity, Hübener was betrayed and eventually executed by Hitler's government for his crimes of conscience. Adding even more to the tragedy, his branch president excommunicated Hübener, making him a double martyr, politically and religiously.

John D. Lee, however, is a harder sell as a noble figure, as he was one of the chief participants in the infamous and tragic Mountain Meadows Massacre. As one of the perpetrators of one of the deadliest acts of religious zealotry in the nineteenth century, it is a tough task to place him in the same league as the conscientious Hübener. Yet Rogers

does accomplish a sympathetic and moving portrayal of Lee as a tragic figure in *Fire in the Bones*, though one I still find highly problematic considering his status as a mass murderer of innocent men, women, and children. Like Shakespeare, who can even give Richard III a sympathetic twist when facing his death at the end of that famous tragedy, Rogers digs deep to find the human, even in the darkest parts of our natures.

After the Mountain Meadows Massacre, John D. Lee, while initially protected by Mormon leadership—especially Brigham Young, who saw the zealous and devoted Lee as an adopted son—was, like Hübener, scapegoated and offered as a sacrifice to the US government to deflect the attention off the rest of the community. Also like Hübener, Lee was excommunicated from the church he had sacrificed so much for, even the sacrifice of his honor and eventually the sacrifice of his life. In two essays and an interview, Rogers gives us a good deal of the context and consequences behind the writing of these honest, spiritual, but dangerous (at least according to some past overly-orthodox sources) plays.

*Huebener* was one of the most overwhelmingly successful plays to ever run at BYU, with an extended run and over five thousand audience members. Despite such an encouraging enthusiasm, Rogers was asked not to perform the play again, as some Church leadership expressed concern that the play might have a revolutionary effect if spread among Latter-day Saints in the Cold War political reality of the time. If this act of censorship weren't enough, Rogers was released early from his responsibilities with the BYU Honors Program, and it did seem as if, like Hübener and Lee, his very membership in the Church might have been in jeopardy.

Here's one of the most interesting things about Hübener and Lee, though: both had their memberships reinstated after their deaths. Once cooler minds and warmer hearts within the Church leadership had a chance to review their cases, their stories had a more redemptive bent. The same can be said of Rogers. Though there were some who were threatened by his honest and unvarnished portrayals of our tragic

natures, there were others who eventually lauded and praised him for such clear-eyed spirituality and integrity. The Church eventually trusted him with deeply responsible positions, as he was called to be the mission president for the Russia St. Petersburg Mission and was assigned as the traveling LDS patriarch in eastern Europe.

In the short term, spiteful fate seems to punish honesty. Yet the long arm of God's grace catches up with such injustices. *Let Your Hearts and Minds Expand* is some of the fruit of Rogers's authenticity and true-eyed faith. As Terry Givens writes in the foreword, Rogers "reminds us, without saying so explicitly, that Latter-day Saints too often forget our legacy that sets us apart: we are supposed to believe the adventure loomed *outside* the Garden" (xiii). Knowledge may lead to penalty, but it is also the first step on the road to eternal life.



## Lapsing into Daredevilry

Shawn Vestal. *Daredevils*. New York: Penguin Press, 2016. 308 pp. Hardcover: \$27.00. ISBN: 978-1-101-97989-1.

*Reviewed by Julie J. Nichols*

It's a hard truth: you have to be damn smart to be a writer of good fiction. If you're dumb, forget it. You have to hear words in your head—and who doesn't? But you also have to know how to put them together in a sentence that's not only grammatical but original in its context, truer than any other sentence could possibly be. Then you have to do that with paragraphs and chapters in the service of a whole whose shape knocks readers right out of unconsciousness, makes them alive, blasts their eyes open so they see the world new.