perfectly beautiful day" (47). Handley is at his best and most compelling when he delves into the theological rationale for Bennion's beliefs.

Occasionally, Handley wanders fairly far afield from Bennion's aphorisms. His exegesis of the directive to "Learn to like what doesn't cost much," for example, lingers on a desire for social justice whose connections to Bennion's directive is tangential and tenuous. Bennion, he writes, "never limited his service to people of his own faith or to those in his own circles. His commitment was to broaden his circles however and whenever he could. I suppose the alternative is to risk believing that the world consists of people in the conditions of those most immediately around us. There is poverty in such an imagination" (18). These are beautiful sentiments, artfully expressed; their relation to "what doesn't cost much" remains, for me, unclear. If, here and elsewhere, Handley strays from the task at hand, his wanderings are, at least, worthwhile ventures.

Learning to Like Life is an easy book to like. And for those like me, who never knew Lowell Bennion, Handley's book does the important service of turning our minds and hearts to his consecrated life and wise teachings—both are worth revisiting.

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The Gift of Language

Heidi Naylor. *Revolver.* Salt Lake City: BCC Press, 2018. 190 pp. Paper: $9.95. ISBN: 9781948218009.

Reviewed by Michael Andrew Ellis

The stories in Heidi Naylor's short story collection *Revolver* present characters who have experienced regret, grief, loss, and even death. As

readers, we have the opportunity to peer into the abyss of their lives, while still garnering from the experience some little hope to carry on. Sounds grim, perhaps, but literature allows us to experience vicariously the circumstances, situations, and tragedies we would rather avoid in our own lives, perhaps with the hope that we might learn therefrom. To walk in another's shoes. Naylor's stories don't "preach," rather, they present life as it is, refusing to offer easy answers or comforting reassurances that "all is well" within Zion or without. In short, they present life in all its ugliness, beauty, and irony. The language is fresh, and the images exquisite. The collection is almost equal parts Mormon-themed and not, but the Mormon-themed stories have a universality to them that broaden their appeal beyond a Mormon literary audience. I will highlight a few of the best stories.

The title story, "Revolver," tells of a World War II veteran who attends a Memorial Day ceremony at the local cemetery and recalls a regrettable incident from his days as a soldier. The irony is that Klink was a former Nazi who fought in Russia, but after the war, he came to America, settled in Idaho, married, changed his name, became a respectable citizen, and reared a daughter. Americans will forgive anything, he thinks. Klink dwells on the time, however, when he and his commander stumbled on a Russian woman and her children hiding in a cellar. Klink's commander leaves him to have his way with the woman and then to kill her and the children, but the situation goes in an unexpected direction. The story was nominated for a Pushcart Prize and won the fiction award at *New Letters* magazine in 2010.

"A Season of Curing" introduces us to Margo and Ripley, who are divorced, but meet for drinks to commemorate Ripley's fifty-eighth birthday. The introductory paragraph is genius, luring us in with Ripley's thoughts about the nature of "success" and "failure," only we don't know in the first paragraph that these thoughts are Ripley's. "People do things. It's the lament of the people who don't." The meeting of Margo and Ripley is strained with memories of Ripley's finding

other women attractive, but not so much Margo. This is a great story of a failed marriage and the ensuing tension between the parties even when they attempt to be civil with each other. But even more than the failed relationship, what stands out is Ripley's sense of having failed in life and how depressed that makes him. The final lines are haunting, although portending a possible second chance: "It was too bad. For when it came down to it he doubted he could change. Revision was for the young. It may well be too late."

Of the stories that have no apparent Mormon characters or themes, "The Hardness of Steel" is my favorite. Conrad is visiting the house of his late parents in a Pennsylvania steel town and reflects on the town's decline because of imported steel. He remembers his father's confrontation with a neighbor who lost his job at the mill. Naylor portrays desperation, loss, and longing so well. Another great closing line, on bleakness: "The hard energy, dry as feathers, that pushes forward at all expense."

In her "Mormon" stories, Naylor uses a character's Mormonness as one of many aspects, not unlike ginger-colored hair. In other words, these are characters who just happen to be Mormon.

"The Mandelbrot Set," a story that is shaped by the meaning of its title and the stressed phrase of "time, patience, repetition, belief," presents events from the life of Ginger, one of the "rare Mormons in the Delaware Valley," from her youth through her graduate-level study of mathematics. For purposes of this story, a Mandelbrot set is less its mathematical definition and more its "aesthetic appeal . . . as an example of a complex structure arising from the application of simple rules."[1] Ginger is gifted at the piano, and one of her practice sessions is where we are first introduced to the phrase "time, patience, repetition, belief." Ginger works at a bakery, and one afternoon the baker molests her. Naylor juxtaposes memories of a young women leader's

1. Wikipedia, s.v. "Mandelbrot set," last modified Jan. 27, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mandelbrot_set.

admonitions about modesty with the act of molestation, as well as the image of Ginger as violated dough in the baker's hands. It's a beautifully rendered, heartbreaking scene. We then follow Ginger through graduation and on to studying higher mathematics. At a conference about the Mandelbrot set, she meets and becomes involved with an older man who is none other than Ripley McCord, the character from "A Season of Curing." In high school Ginger moved away from Mormonism, which tends to find teleological meaning in just about everything, yet curiously in the closing paragraphs she finds meaning in the way events have conspired to create a moment where the patterns that have been there all along are clear, in the Mandelbrot set, and in the possibility of love with Ripley. She's still finding patterns. The irony is that the reader, already familiar with Ripley, is uncertain whether he is prepared to give her what she anticipates.

"The Home Teacher" can be read as a homage to Levi S. Peterson's "The Christianizing of Coburn Heights." Brock, the home teacher, is asked by his bishop to help an older couple make their money stretch. The couple wants food orders, but the bishop wants them schooled in self-reliance. The narrative of Brock's seemingly futile attempts to get Merv and his wife to budget is juxtaposed with Brock's memory from his mission of helping a homeless man addicted to heroin get clean and begin a new life in the gospel. If Brock could help Clive then, why can't he help Merv now? The story compels the reader to ask where the line between being used and being helpful lies. Also, while Brock has faith in planning down to the cent, we wonder how much this ability comes from the comforts he takes for granted.

"Name" places Lisbeth, a teenage Mormon girl, squarely in the sordid circumstances of "the World." She works as a lottery ticket agent at a newsstand in a Pennsylvania strip mall, uncomfortably peddling "gambling, pornography, and nicotine like they were pure pulled taffy." By cleverly setting up an exchange with Donny Osmond, Naylor introduces the idea that names hold power. After an experience

with an obnoxious customer, Lisbeth comes to realize the power that someone speaking your name can give or take from you. In an artful twist, it's an autographed name that saves Lisbeth.

"Jane's Journey" is an incredible story set in England that begins with the courtship of Jane's mother and father, Tom and Mariane Munday. Dirt poor, they live on the land of a man named Granger. They have two children, Walter and Jane. They are happy at first, but after Granger's wife gets sick, Granger requests Mariane to come nurse his wife. Granger continues to call for her until it becomes clear that his interest in her is for more than as a nurse. It's during this time that Walter goes off to war. Tom and Mariane's relationship is strained, and Mariane loses respect in the eyes of Jane. Then there is the door, a gift from Granger, that Tom and Jane turn into a table. But its fit inside the little cottage they live in symbolizes the influence for ill that Granger has had in their lives. Over the years, Walter goes missing, and Tom dies in a freak accident. Jane marries, and then decides to go to America with the Mormons. I'll leave the ending in question, but what is remarkable about this story is that one reads the sections as "true" history, but then in the final section the narrator admits to creating these stories from "scanty [family] narratives long on piety, short on details." It causes the reader to view everything they have read up till then in a new light.

In conclusion, Heidi Naylor has a gift for language and evoking characters with whom you can relate and feel. You will not be disappointed with what they have to offer.

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