

DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought



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DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

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THOUGHTS ON LATINO MORMONS, THEIR AFTERLIFE, AND THE NEED FOR A NEW HISTORICAL PARADIGM FOR SAINTS OF COLOR

Ignacio M. García

The following thoughts come from my experience as a faithful and orthodox Latter-day Saint, as a Mormon bishop, as a critic of some aspects of institutionalized Mormonism, and as an activist and scholar of faith navigating what is and has been for most of my life a complicated environment where racial/ethnic issues are ever present but rarely discussed in ways that bring closure. My particular scholarship and activism on behalf of Mexicans and Latinos is encapsulated within this setting and I admit that I have not been freed from the complication that it brings to my faith except for those moments when I immerse myself in those Latino Mormon spaces that are my Spanish-language barrios (wards).¹

These thoughts somewhat expanded formed the foundation of a presentation that I gave at Utah Valley University's conference on "Multicultural Mormonism" sponsored by the Religious Studies program on March 29–30, 2017.

1. When I use the term "Latino" I refer to people from Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean who have made their home in the United States, though at times what I say is also applicable to people of those countries who do not make it here. These concepts and assumptions come from my understanding of scholarship on Latinos and over many years of congregating and worshipping with them. I also use the term "Saints of color" to refer to all peoples of color within Mormonism, though my thoughts are more applicable to those peoples who have at one time or another been referred to as "Lamanites": Native Americans, Latinos of indigenous origin, Polynesians,

Even there, though, I am reminded that, along with my people and other Saints of color, I am part of a larger theologically white whole.² Here, larger implies influence, dominance, and leadership rather than size.

For the most part, however, it comes with the caveat that the white Church loves me—us—and most of us nonwhites have reciprocated, loving this Church, finding tranquility here, creating eternal friendships within, and often receiving answers to our heartfelt prayers regardless of where we fit in the body of Christ.

I fully recognize that mine are not the feelings of everyone who studies Mormonism, but unless we understand and allow for that fundamental notion of relationship between the Church and those of color, we cannot fully understand Mormonism and why it continues to grow among Latinos and other Saints of color.

I would not have overcome my inferiority complex, lack of educational direction, and social awkwardness without the fellowship of

and other islanders. Some non-indigenous origin Latin American Saints have also socially constructed themselves into either “Latino” or “Lamanite” and thus can lay claim to similar experiences. Black Latino Saints sometimes also see themselves more Latino than black, but that is a complicated issue not within the purviews of this essay. Other Saints of color—Asian, African, African American, and Middle Eastern people, etc.—might find that some ideas and concepts here fit their circumstances within the Church, but they are unlikely to truly speak to their experiences.

2. By a “white church” I mean that the institution itself was established on principles and encased within structures that favored the founding population group and its descendants. Because the founding members of the Church were white Americans, mostly semi-literate and unsophisticated due to the limits of their economic circumstances, they spoke of a gospel with unsophisticated but defined social, cultural, and racial boundaries. As more and more of these people converted, they brought their lived experiences and biases and transformed them into a cultural spirituality with large ambitions but little understanding of the world around them beyond the part that impacted their lives. Mormonism brought energy, creativity, communal yearnings, and spiritual awakening to its converts, but did so within contexts and structures they could understand, and Americans understood very little beyond their daily experience.

other Mormons: brown and white, male and female, with authority or without, fully active or not so much. In the Church, I learned public speaking, practiced sports, participated in theater and scouting, acquired administrative skills, and developed a love of learning both secular and spiritual material. I owe my writing and my scholarship to the early inquisitiveness that I acquired in studying Mormon scripture.

More important, the Church taught me about compassion, service, forgiveness, and, while I often struggle to attain it, humility. As a young child in poverty—and most assuredly before my personal conversion, one without a future—the Church changed the direction of my life as it did for my brother and several friends who are still within the Mormon fold. Coming from a family that fought against the alienation that comes to immigrant families torn from their country, thrust into the labor market of long days with little pay and pigeonholed in poor, service-less ethnic neighborhoods, the Church seemed an oasis to the flawed but morality-yearning García clan of four.

At the same time, I came to recognize, though not fully understand, our theology as one mired in complications and contradictions—influenced by cultural norms, racial differences, national identities, political views, and more and more economic disparities. Each of these contribute in different ways to modern Mormon theology, and though we often try hard to interpret them so as to make them work for all, we Latinos find some success only by keeping or trying to keep these external factors outside the narrative of the “true church.”

LDS views of God’s work became confined by American racialism, laws, and middle-class social values. The daily spiritual experience, which is often complicated and messy, became framed as one that is ordinary, consistent with a particular status quo, pigeonholed in one culture and under one political umbrella, and kept away from those experiences not neatly embraced by American ideals of order, propriety, and good old free enterprise. Whether we like to admit it or not, however, fewer and fewer Mormons of all stripes fully believe this version

of Mormonism anymore, and every new history book on Mormonism challenges its underlying cultural whiteness; yet it remains entrenched in our institutional memory, in our manuals, sometimes in our conference talks, and too often in the deep chambers of our minds and hearts, “whitening” away our institutional history from the reality of people’s experiences—particularly those of color and the poor.

Because we have no creeds and because our theology often derives from reaction—sometimes prophetic and at other times not—to what our leaders perceive around them, Latter-day Saints find our beliefs sometimes grow out of varied tunnels of perception within the culture, philosophy, and lived experience of particular leaders. And because our leaders, in the modern era at least, find comfort in solidarity and in not debating publicly even when there is disagreement, many contradictions are allowed to coexist, particularly those that deal with Latinos and other Saints of color. While some members are able to unravel these illogicalities, most of the membership simply believes what is taught at the given moment by a particular leader, so as to serve and worship in peace.

I came to see these illogicalities quite clearly as I grew up, but initially I believed in the Church so passionately that they did not matter. I often argued with my senior home teaching companion, adamantly declaring that the prophet was perfect and so were most of the apostles. I believed Church leaders were at a stage of spirituality way beyond my own and that of those around me. Because the “prophet and the Brethren” were far away in some place called “Utah” and everyone testified to all that they said, it was hard for me not to think of them as living in a higher plane of existence.

I grew up, however, in the poor Mexican west side of town, and soon enough I learned about those tall, white-skinned, blue-eyed individuals who lived outside the confines of our barrio. We knew that when they came to our beloved West Side they came to lead, instruct, enforce, and to judge. I was too young then to understand, but our visiting stake

authorities also came with the same intent, even if they preempted their actions with praise for our “spirituality” and our “humility” along with hardy handshakes. Most were sincere and their teachings enlarged my faith and strengthened my fidelity to the Mormon gospel, though the speakers were often oblivious or indifferent to the asymmetric relationship between us.

Initially, I was not fully conscious of the top-down, white-to-brown dichotomy in the Church. We knew that not all our white brothers and sisters felt comfortable with us, but we tended to see the problem as that of the rank-and-file white members—those, we thought, who had not matured spiritually—and not our leaders.

That changed when I was seventeen or eighteen as I became aware of the racial and ethnic inconsistencies within some Mormon practices and of the lack of empathy of some of our white brothers and sisters toward my people. Many incidents cast doubt on the kind of relationship that I thought I had with traditional Mormonism, but two stand out as I write this.

The first occurred during the first municipal election that I can remember. The barrios of San Antonio, Texas were thrilled by the fact that we *finally* had a Mexican-American candidate not picked by any Anglo or white political group, and who spoke to our needs in the barrio. Needless to say, many of my Spanish-language ward members were also excited about the possibilities—that is, until we found out he was running against our stake president who had been in the city council for years. This troubled me and a number of our members and led to hallway discussions, sincere but sometimes pointed debates, and much self-reflection. Our hearts said we should vote for President Bremer, but our reason argued that we had voted for too many politicians like him before. While a nice and often kind man, as a politician he offered little difference from those who had governed us for so many years. Their platform had always been about honesty, business-friendly government, and a balanced budget, which we often

interpreted as the way they kept us in line, in an asymmetric relationship that always favored them and offered us only nickel-and-dime services and grudgingly slow upward mobility.³

Pete Torres, a young lawyer who grew up in our barrio, on the other hand, spoke about filling our potholes, providing storm drains and stop signs, and finding federal grants to fix much of the decaying housing in our area. He understood our concerns about police brutality and insensitivity in city hall. He also spoke to us in our language, both linguistically and culturally. He inspired us to imagine a better and more inclusive San Antonio, something that white politicians always spoke about being a reality in the Alamo City, but which we knew to be false.

As the campaign wore on, I reflected on the fact that, though I loved the man who shook our hands and smiled at us in church, I had little in common with him outside the Church. He was one of the “good gringos,” but he was still more like them than us and he seemed quite happy and comfortable with the prejudiced and indifferent society that surrounded us outside our barrio boundaries. He appeared oblivious to our needs and very soon some of his words on Sundays rang hollow, at least they did to me, because they lacked a sincere love for the brown Saints. Shortly after the election, my home teaching companion and I ran into him at the stake center. He asked my companion if he had voted. Nervously, Roberto responded that he had forgotten and the president walked away shaking his head. My companion leaned over to me and said, “I couldn’t tell him I voted for Pete,” who had won.

The second incident occurred about a year later, when a new stake president had been called. I remember that it was a Saturday morning and my priest advisor and I had gone to the stake president’s house to buy Church books, the only place you could get them outside of Utah in those days. We were there only a short time, attended by the all-smiles

3. Many of the following incidents are recorded in my memoir *Chicano While Mormon: Activism, War, and Keeping the Faith* (Madison, Wis.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015).

and attentive wife of the stake president, when another white member came to look for books. I'm not sure how the conversation turned to the explosive issue of police brutality—or, in their words, law enforcement.

Only a few days earlier a young Mexican-American boy of about twelve years had entered one of the rich homes in the east side of town. The police arrived, the frightened boy ran, and one of the police officers fired six shots into his back. The death caused an uproar in the west side of San Antonio because police shootings were all too common, and we had learned at a young age to fear law enforcement. In the east side, where the police served as a line of defense to white San Antonio, the residents felt more secure that the police had responded quickly and had “taken care of” the perpetrator of the crime.

It was hard for my advisor and me not to listen, and when I heard them express their approval of the police officer's action, I stepped forward, outside my Latino zone and beyond the safe space of Mormon conversation, to speak to two white people about a social issue. “How can you justify the officer's actions?” I asked both, but my eyes were firmly fixed on the stake president's wife, whom I expected to be the adult Mormon in the backyard. Stunned, the man took a step back, but the president's wife looked me straight in the eyes and with a voice that barely contained her anger, she said, “I would have done the same thing if he had entered my home.”

“But he was only a child,” I managed to say as my advisor literally dragged me out of the stake president's backyard. All the way home, the man who would later be my bishop and a Church patriarch remained silent, fully aware, I'm guessing, that he had again for the umpteenth time in his life been intimidated by a white person, even one without any priesthood authority. Perhaps he was simply angry that I had crossed boundaries and embarrassed him, or worse, maybe he agreed with her as a law-abiding Mormon. I hope, though, it was the first. Many years later I would write in my memoir:

Separated by geographic distance, we were normally spared the social interactions with our white brothers and sisters that helped us avoid situations like those at the stake president's house. In our constructed religious and spiritual sphere, we were all fellow saints with the common goal to serve the church and our fellow beings. There wasn't supposed to be any differences between us when it came to the faith, but incidents like those as well as others served to remind us that the sons and daughters of Ephraim were to rule over those of us from Manassas.⁴

Both incidents revealed a disconnect between our white brothers/sisters and us. What could we have said to the stake president/city councilman to convince him that poverty, segregation, and discrimination were killing our community? How could I explain to the next president's wife that we Mexicans were not a threat to her, and that our lives mattered more than her property? If worshipping and congregating periodically with us, or Book of Mormon promises, had not already convinced them of our spiritual siblinghood and commitment to the gospel, what could our inarticulate words do?

Many similar incidents occurred when I went into the army, college, and thereafter, and each has served to reaffirm that between us, spiritual siblinghood seemed only to appear in our constructed religious space. Except for once while in college, those encounters did not shake my faith, but they did contextualize my Mormonism away from an unwavering institutional loyalty to a more nuanced love for the gospel. I continued to listen to the counsel of the Brethren, but it made me aware that I needed to judge Church leaders' policies and actions within the context of human experience and circumstances.

I also became aware that Mormonism has a fundamentally white and American interpretation of religion and the eternal. I once heard that apostle Mark E. Petersen said the American flag would fly in heaven and that we would all speak English in our celestial home.⁵ Whether he

4. García, *Chicano While Mormon*, 65.

5. This was told to me by a home teaching companion I had as a young man.

did or not, it would not be out of character. His 1954 talk at Brigham Young University was one of the most insensitive official sermons on the “black problem” given by a presiding Church authority. He implied that blacks only wanted equality so they could have sexual relationships with white women.⁶ He also taught the notion that those in the tribe of Ephraim would rule over those of Manassas.⁷ The fact that now some Saints of color are being assigned to the tribe of Ephraim seems to—in a backdoor sort of way—give credence to the notion that Saints of color, particularly Latino Saints, are becoming “white and delightful” through obedience.⁸

6. See Mark E. Petersen’s talk to a convention of teachers of education at Brigham Young University, titled “Race Problems—As they Affect the Church,” August 29, 1954. For his view on Mexican Saints, see his *Children of the Promise: Lamanites Yesterday and Today* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1981).

7. Professor Armando Solorzano, who was the first night’s keynote speaker at the “Multicultural Mormonism” conference, and I spoke the night before and he told me a story about an inconsolable woman with two daughters. One of them was light skinned and the other of darker complexion. The first one was told she came from the tribe of Ephraim while the latter was told she came from the tribe of Manassas. Mormon leaders use 1 Chronicles 5:1–2 and Jeremiah 31:9 and Doctrine and Covenants 133:26–34 to elevate those who are white above all others. The fact that the descendants of Ephraim are those who would write the Book of Mormon solidified their preferred status.

8. We see this kind of thinking in President Spencer W. Kimball’s—Elder Kimball at the time—talk “The Day of the Lamanites,” in which he spoke of the growth of the Church among Native Americans and how they were becoming “white and delightful” because of their obedience and membership in the Church. Reading it now can be quite uncomfortable since many consider him a pioneer in expanding the Church, its services, and its fellowship to Saints of color. There is probably no doubt that many Lamanites at the time felt empowered and encouraged that they were shedding “the scales of darkness . . . from their eyes” (Report of the SemiAnnual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, October 1960 [Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, semiannual], 32–37; also available at <http://scriptures.byu.edu/gettalk.php?ID=1091&era=yes>).

What some members and leaders often don't appreciate is what these kinds of ideas do to the mind and thought of Latinos and other Saints of color. The fact that we now mostly reject those notions does little to erase the memories or to overlook their constant repetition for most of the Church's history.⁹ Church leaders rarely explain themselves. They often just assume that people will forget all they have read or heard before, thus allowing incorrect and misleading theological notions about race and ethnicity to remain widespread.

While waiting in the Timpanogos Temple lobby for the sealing of a young couple, my ward bishop leaned over and whispered to me, "Isn't it interesting that when white people out in the world marry a Latino their children come out brown, while in the Church that same combination comes out whiter. Must be the fulfillment of prophecy." Taken aback, I was not able to respond at that moment. About an hour or so later while waiting for the couple to come out and take pictures, another committed Latino leader said to me with genuine concern, "We Latinos are not ready for more important leadership in the Church or society." He then alluded to the fact that we have not yet blossomed as foretold by prophecy.

Some Latino Mormons have clung to this unequal theology by trying to massage, filter, and re-conceptualize this white Mormon narrative so as not to find fault with the Church. Eventually, however, even the most loyal of those who question these precepts give up and simply hope that things will be different in the afterlife and that all that we have been taught which offends or demeans us will be refuted in the future or the world to come.

9. A case in point is my brother who after almost thirty years of inactivity came back to Church and became a voracious reader of Church books, but was unfortunately introduced to literature of an era gone by—mostly works from and by Saints in the Mesa, Arizona area, probably one of Mormonism's most reactionary enclaves. It has taken him years to slowly shed some of the self-blame attitudes that Saints of color get from that kind of literature.

As Latter-day Saints, we have been taught that this earthly period is a preparation for a much longer life after the grave. If that is the case, then for us Saints of color our collective preparation here has been to be good second-class citizens in the afterlife: obedient, faithful, and unquestioning. God works in mysterious ways, though the outcomes are rarely mysterious to us since they follow the pattern of the world where whites always seem to come out ahead of any discussion, conflict, reasoning, or leadership calling.

If we truly want, and I think most of us do, a multicultural Church, we must have a multicultural theology, a multicultural history, and a multicultural leadership structure, which is something we cannot easily claim to have now, nor do we seem to be preparing too rapidly for it. Multiculturalism within the Church can only happen if Saints of color have their history told, are empowered by their religious identity, and have an institutional role. If we don't, then Mormonism—a faith many of us love dearly—remains a white religion with shades of color in which Latinos and others remain governed and acted upon and not agents unto themselves in defining and constructing the future of the Church or interpreting its past.

When a Peruvian brother says he wants the Resurrection to come quickly because he wants to arise tall, blond, and blue-eyed, he reflects the fundamental default position of many Latinos who have bought into a white theology that, as uncomfortable as it might be to discuss, remains unchallenged at its core among Church officials and most intellectual critics.¹⁰ Few white Mormon leaders realize how insidious this default position is. And they fail to understand, at least from the standpoint of Latino Mormons, that if the explanation of our final destination is unequal, then all that the Church believes of the present and of its history is suspect, unfair, discriminatory or, God forbid, a true reflection

10. This was told to me by our stake Spanish-speaking patriarch, Victor Hugo Gamero.

of a celestial pecking order which cannot be (collectively) avoided no matter our faith and our works.

Mormonism has always had a way out of its racial dilemmas because the “solution” is given in the Book of Mormon where it affirms that the “colored” righteous will someday become “fair and delightsome”—or “turn white” as we used to say when I was growing up a brown Mormon—thus eliminating any need to explain whether color or racial identity really matter in heaven or in the present Church experience. More bluntly, most white Mormons don’t care what color we are in heaven because color, race, or ethnicity for them has never been an issue in their personal progression.

Even as the world around us debates and reflects on the role of racial mixing and ethnic and racial identity in society, Mormonism still clings to the Latino bishop’s perceptions of “whitening” or to the “color changing in the blink of an eye” mystery. Thus, Mormon leaders have never had to confront or try to make sense of why our visions of heaven are so white and why the alchemy that justifies it remains for the most part unknown to our prophets, seers, and revelators.

In order to change this, we must take a more profound look at how we write our history, our literature, our theology, and why it must be more than just inclusive. History is important because Mormonism is fundamentally tied to historical interpretation. White Mormons are where they are and Saints of color are where they are because of how we interpret our history: white Mormons’ history is about obedience and righteousness, and the others’ history is about disobedience and unrighteousness. One history involves “accepting the gospel quickly,” and the other involves needing time to be nurtured and to “blossom.” One is a history of “purity” (whiteness), and the other is of working toward some facsimile of whiteness.

Historical geography also plays a part in the interpretation. The Church was restored in a promised land and expands from there as the righteous overtake the savage, where conquest is a fundamental

part of creating the city on the hill. Those on the outside, even when native born or people of the future, are religious immigrants raised in temporary Zions, waiting for a day to be gathered in full fellowship in the American and white bloodline of Zion.

This historical interpretation of second-class citizenship in the kingdom has been made possible by the fact that Latinos and other Saints of color have often faithfully confined themselves to what scholar David Montejano describes as a “white cultural field.” In his excellent book, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836–1986*, which deals with the wholesale segregation of Mexican Americans in the Lone Star State, he argues that one reason why segregation worked so well was that those who were “rich, clean, and loyal were seen as of one color, and the poor, dirty and disloyal of another,” creating a rigid dichotomy that rationalized and thus determined—sometimes self-determined—each one’s place in society.¹¹

One group accepted either blatantly or privately their superiority, while too many of the other group accepted their inferiority; and those who fought against it did so as individuals, arguing that, while many of their people might be inferior, they themselves were not. Does that sound familiar to what happens with some of our more assimilated brothers and sisters of color? Self-hate like that which was expressed by the Peruvian brother is an acquiescence to a theology that privileges one group over many others, and no matter how it is constructed that self-hate, self-loathing, or simply self-limiting attitude is insidious because it sets a collective ceiling to one people. Saints of color then become potentially “exalted beings” even while remaining inferior in their version of the Church’s schematic.

In my chapter of a soon-to-be-published collection of essays edited by Joanna Brooks and Gina Colvin, I argue that Latino members have

11. David Montejano, *Anglos and Mexicans in the Making of Texas, 1836–1986* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 220–34. See chapter 10, “Culture of Segregation.”

been conditioned to be the stepsons and daughters of a loving God, and when they argue against that, they do so by either seeking to be seen as closer to white Mormons or by creating their own religious bubble, which rarely includes whites but which is fundamentally structured in the white way of Mormonism.¹² Unfortunately, many Latinos have swallowed this interpretation of their religious reality lock, stock, and barrel and are trapped into silent embarrassment and thus unable to fully reflect on what it means to be who they are, why they are governed or led the way they are, and why they have so little presence in their religious history and theology. Privileging white skin over colored not only led to conquest and oppression in the secular world but also to a diminished role for people of color within the Church.

This de-privileging was a direct outcome of being an ahistorical people within Mormonism, something that has come about systematically—if not always maliciously—and not randomly as we often like to believe. The Church History Department has not yet hired Latinos or Saints of color to help in writing Church history, and the BYU religion department has seen little need to discuss the issues of race and ethnicity or to recruit, mentor, and empower Latinos and other Saints of color to enter the field of Mormon studies. This lack of opportunity keeps us from being actors in the historical drama of Mormonism and prevents us from developing the analytical filters necessary to speak or write about ourselves in any meaningful way. We remain in the footnotes, endnotes, or even in the addendum of Mormonism, but never in the main text except as a complement to the larger white narrative.

Last year, I had an interesting conversation with Fernando Gomez, director of the Provo Museum of Mormon Mexican History, and his wife Enriqueta. Together they have dedicated their lives to promoting, highlighting, and teaching the history of the Mexican Saints in Mexico

12. See “Empowering Latino Saints to Transcend Historical Racialism: A Bishop’s Tale,” in *Toward a Post-Colonial Mormonism: Consciousness, Resistance and Adaptation* (forthcoming from University of Utah Press).

and the US and have recently begun to expand the scope of their work to include all Latino Saints. The museum is a fascinating mosaic of historical tidbits, documents, and photos of the Mexican Saints' effort to live the Mormon gospel, and there is no intent to hide the complexities of that religious journey, which at times has meant conflict between Mexican and white Mormons. More importantly, the museum attempts to correct some of the historical record that has often depicted Mexican Mormons as not quite able to live the Church experience in a correct way.

During our lunch discussion, Enriqueta said to me that it was extremely hard to get Mexican and Latino Saints out to see their exhibits and attend the occasional lectures and activities at the museum, located just across the street from BYU. Local ward leaders were unwilling to work with them. A recent attempt to conduct a regional oral history project has had a very rocky launch, as local Latino ecclesiastical leaders were ambivalent about putting much effort into it.¹³ Our consensus was that Latino Mormon history is not important to too many Latino Saints because it is not important to influential cultural, social, and ecclesiastical leaders in the LDS Church. Fernando and Queta told me that they have been approached by the institutional Church to donate what they have to the Church History Department and let them decide how, when, and for how long to utilize that which is precious and critical to them.

This made me think about how white Saints rarely see beyond a superficial exoticism in the lives of Latino Mormons. A case in point is a recent "fiesta" in our stake, something that was decided on by the stake presidency, not us. I'm not sure what it was meant to be, but as good Latino Saints the members of my ward put together a dance routine, delicious food, and song performances. There was also a part in which one of the brothers told the stake members something about Latin America and Latino Mormonism, but it all turned into a crazy market

13. By the middle of 2017, over a thousand people had come to see the exhibits, but less than one per cent of those were Latino, at least according to surname. This was told and shown to me by Fernando Gomez, the museum's director.

scene with too many stake members, too much noise, and too little appreciation of what was happening because the food was “really good.”

The white members left amazed at our food and dance, and Latino members left feeling good that our white brothers and sisters liked our food and dance. Now, the stake president wants to make this a yearly event in which we cook, dance, and sing for them—in all fairness some of the white sisters did bring their favorite Mexican dishes and this year it’s going to be an international festival—and they will again appreciate our culinary skills and our quick feet, but not our history or our thoughts. And we will be left with the notion that our white brothers and sisters like us, maybe even love us—but nothing substantive will change except for some more comments by visiting stake leaders on how they like our food and how friendly we are.¹⁴

I often see Latino Saints cry at the pulpit over pioneer stories and the hardships of our early members—we had a whole month of it this year—and I reflect on all the stories of faith, sacrifice, and fidelity that remain untold about our own people and those of other Saints of color. The earlier interest in Polynesian, Native American, and Latino members within the Church leadership has faded, replaced by an interest in the “international Church” whose history, unfortunately, is still perceived in terms of the “other” as the division between white and colored continues to play out.

I applaud the women of the Church who have found ways to push back and become part of the Mormon history discussion. Unfortunately, this discussion has mostly centered around white women. Their sisters of color remain in the background or as the recipients of their white counterpart’s actions. This means that if we are not careful, our history

14. Interestingly our bishop chose a public school teacher in our congregation to give the history lecture rather than me. I assume he worried that stake leaders might take exception to what I might say. That the bishop was a friend—and who knew or should have known that I would never embarrass him or the congregation—only accentuates our timidity in speaking openly about our history.

might become fully contextualized by whiteness and privilege, with all white members, regardless of gender, on the side that is recorded and all Saints of color remaining on the sketchy side where we appear as a backdrop. One solution to this problem might start with a quick visit to the Provo museum and also to the depository of Mexican Mormon history that the Church established in Mexico City where documents and stories are being accumulated from the Mexican Saints.¹⁵

As written today, our history privileges those who founded the Church, developed priesthood ordinances, designed temples, or dedicated new lands for missions. It also says in so many words that we people of color did not write, translate, or receive new scriptures, and we never became prophets—at least not since Samuel the Lamanite—and unless that changes soon, why should we expect to see anything different in the afterlife. Our historical and theological black holes suggest that when it comes to heaven, we will again be waiting for our turn, for our moment of merit, when the scales of our hearts will finally fall, and we become “fair and delightsome.” While the Church is still young (and who knows how long humanity will abide on this earth), it is nonetheless imperative that we consider these questions because the end goal determines much of the effort and the perspective we use in our situations.

Latinos who want to write our history fear doing so because deep inside they feel that they are suspect—still in need of proving their faith and loyalty to the institution—and that writing complicated Latino Mormon history is no way to prove that fidelity. They may exaggerate their fears, but they feel they know only too well the consequences of putting themselves in that situation. They will leave the task to those whom they see as having the space—or privilege—to write Mormon history and still be perceived as people of faith.

15. See Jason Swensen, “Mexico’s Rich History Preserved at Newly Dedicated Records Center,” *Deseret News*, April 20, 2017, <https://www.lds.org/church/news/mexicos-rich-history-preserved-at-newly-dedicated-records-center?lang=eng>.

Some may argue that most rank-and-file Latino and other Saints of color really care little for this intellectualizing, given their daily struggles and their own desire to become better Mormons. Why engage in something that at the moment and for many years now has been delegitimized as a meaningful concern? Why look for stories and heroes we know exist but have rarely ever been heard of outside their homes or in the occasional ethnic ward where someone speaks about their own family or a dear friend's journey of faith? Yet, it should matter to all of us, and particularly to those who write the history, explain the theology, give the sermons, and produce the art and literature, because these stories are the tapestry through which our lives can be understood and also the links we form to the larger gospel history.

The ironic thing about our Latino Mormon story—and that of other Saints of color—is that it is a narrative of faith in the most fundamental way. So many have stayed in the Church even though they have often been seen as stepchildren in the Mormon kingdom, and even though their personal history is littered with disappointment, frustration, racial slights, and perceptions of not being ready for prime time. All while being reminded that “their time” will come.

In its early years, Mormonism attempted to diversify itself, albeit feebly, by proselyting various racial and ethnic groups and socioeconomic classes, who were invited to partake of the gospel message. But Mormonism, like most European ethnicity in America, traded its soul for whiteness and in doing so homogenized its European and American stock into a white membership—not without some tension, of course—and distanced the racial groups or theologically subordinated them by making their experiences and their interpretations of the spiritual strange or inappropriate.¹⁶

16. See W. Paul Reeve's *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015) and Spencer Fluhman's "A Peculiar People": *Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion*

I remember once asking my Sunday School class members to provide examples of miracles in their lives. After a number of traditional “miracles” one older lady raised her hand and related her miracle: She was driving from Texas to New Mexico on her way to Utah. It was a dry and very hot day as those common in the El Paso area. She was traveling with several children, though I don’t remember if she mentioned a husband. Along the way, they hit a line of cars that were moving slowly, and it became clear that they were going through a border patrol checkpoint. She soon became rather nervous as her whole family was undocumented. Soon there was only one car in front of her and she fervently prayed for some deliverance as she was traveling to Zion and away from a horrible life in Mexico. As the last car in front of her moved on and the border patrolman was ready to wave her to approach, out of nowhere came this strong gust of wind and a downpour of almost nickel-size raindrops descended on the officer. Rather than get wet, the border security waved her to move on. The skies, which had been bright and sunny, had suddenly turned dark and menacing, but less than a block after the checkpoint it again turned bright and sunny.

“God gave us a miracle,” said the woman, “and now my boys have gone on missions and married in the temple, and I will forever be grateful for God’s hand in my coming to this land.”

At that moment, you could see the shock in some middle-class, white members’ faces and the silent and approving nod of the more recent arrivals, many of whom had similar stories to tell. There are many of those miracles; many have to do with church service rendered and others about simply locating to Zion. There are histories yet untold because they do not fit neatly into what has become the traditional Mormon narrative: Mormons don’t break laws and they don’t experience miracles outside of conversion, or they occur only when we deal with medical challenges, financial problems, or in bringing a child back to the fold.

in Nineteenth-Century America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

It was after a storm of criticism for speaking out on the Church's unwillingness to tackle other issues, particularly undocumented immigration, that were confronting Latino Mormons in the Church that I received a critical but respectful e-mail from a Saint who reminded me that we Mormons strongly believed in the twelfth article of faith. He was nice enough to ask me my reasons for what I was saying and I responded respectfully and provided as much background as I could about why I thought the way I did. He thanked me and our correspondence ended.

About a month later, the man wrote to me again, but this was a different person than the one who had been critical. Shortly after we corresponded, he was assigned to the bishop's storehouse to drive several individuals from one building to another to do work, and soon enough found out that all five of the men were undocumented. He admitted to being initially uncomfortable not knowing what to expect, but soon he saw them as good Latter-day Saints, anxious about their jobs, afraid of being deported, and seeking to live the gospel as best they could. He started eating and sharing his food with them and they with him. Though his Spanish was limited, he began communicating as best he could and soon he was absorbed into the world of the Church's undocumented members. When he wrote me this last time, he said that he did not know how, but he was going to help them get their legal status resolved, and that he had no more a desire to call ICE on anyone anymore, especially his brothers in the faith.

This change of heart was similar to one I experienced as bishop. One day while I was talking to my ward clerk, the bishop of the other ward that met in our building popped his head into my office and asked me how I went about reporting to the INS those in my ward who were "illegal." I turned around and said, "If I do I will lose 70 percent of my ward council." He thought for a second, and then said, "Oh, okay." I would find out that soon he had his own undocumented ward members and he assigned a border patrolman to home teach them; the home teacher became their best friend and was soon finding ways to help them navigate

their undocumented world. We had the same situation where our own border patrolman became friends with an undocumented family and soon was scouring cemeteries to find them an identity so they could at least get social security numbers. The true history of the Church has not been written when it belongs to only one group, and when we pigeonhole it, we only see one version of Mormonism. I do not want to give the impression that Mormons of color are all breaking laws and rules. They are not. But those examples provide a glimpse of how the world sometimes frames and complicates our desire to live the faith, especially when we are or are seen as different. The poor, the colored, the disadvantaged often experience and live the gospel in manners that might seem strange to those who are not, yet those experiences are as real and legitimate as any other.

The famous Chicano intellectual Octavio Romano argued that Mexicans—and this could apply to Latino Mormons—are made ahistorical not by their lack of action but by those who write the history. He called social scientists academic mercenaries that marginalized the Mexican people by the narrative they constructed.¹⁷ The same can be said about those who write the Church's history and provide only a footnote or a sidebar for Latino and other Saints of color, when the reality would require that their voices, stories, historical actors, and ideas be a part of the narrative. Romano argued that only by writing their own history would Mexican-Americans liberate themselves from oppression and second-class citizenship.

In my book *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans*, I argue that Chicanos had to reinterpret and write their own history—rather than just simply integrate it into the larger

17. No major work exists on Octavio Romano, but see my *Chicanismo: The Forging of a Militant Ethos among Mexican Americans* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 45–48. Another, even more extensive, discussion on Romano can be found in John Alba Cutler's *Ends of Assimilation: The Formation of Chicano Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 56–89.

narrative—in order to find the strength to liberate themselves from the marginalization of American history. Heroes, places, events, and ideas had to flow out of the Mexicano/Chicano experience, and they could only do so if we focused on them, separating fact from fiction, heroes from anti-heroes, and triumphs from defeats. This focus and sifting was not intended to exclude all others, but rather to emphasize the Chicano experience so that it could gain its own identity.

So, how do we engage in this reinterpretation of the Latino Mormon experience and create new paradigms for Mormon history? Let me share some suggestions. I think we first start by rejecting the traditional narrative that argues that whites became the core of the Church because they were destined to be and because, try as they may, they could not get people of color to live the gospel in a sustainable way. Though the early Church members were given instructions to take the gospel everywhere, and periodically did so, they failed at being steadfast in accomplishing the task because often they were looking to proselyte but not to fellowship, to gather but not to mix, and to govern but not to be governed by the “Other.” Too many were more committed to fulfilling prophecy than to finding those who would come had they known where to find the truth. Mormonism has often suffered from a preoccupation with duty and institutional loyalty to the detriment of real fellowship and a spirituality based on circumstantial gospel experiences that cannot be controlled or simply created.¹⁸ Latino members, particularly those of indigenous origin, have suffered greatly from the traditional white paradigm in which they are often depicted—even if just privately—as being on the other side of duty, civic responsibility, and capability.

18. By “circumstantial gospel experiences,” I mean to acknowledge that there are historical, political, social, and other boundaries that limit, expand, or channel our beliefs. These circumstances do not change the validity of the gospel message nor excuse wrong moral choices, but knowing of them does help us to understand why different Mormon communities live the gospel the way they do.

Unlike the Book of Mormon's Ammon and the sons of Mosiah, we Mormons have allowed the hardship, general practices of society, personal prejudices, and organizational priorities to justify our lack of commitment to the full evangelization of God's children.¹⁹ We need to question the notion that God wanted us to wait until some distant future. Whether intended or not, this idea of waiting for the right time is insidious because it separates Saints of color from the core of the gospel experience. We preach a new, inclusive, ever-expanding "universal" gospel, but often end up practicing the old Israel "chosen people" theology that was exclusive, ethnocentric, and, in the end, exhausted and self-diminishing.

Second, we need to point out and question Mormonism's historical accommodation to American exceptionalism, which formed part of a larger European colonialist effort in which whites were seen as superior to people of color. Mexico and much of Latin America has and continues to suffer from this exceptionalism that privileges American interests and those of "whites" within those nations. Led by elites, this supremacist attitude was soon embraced by the poor, the yeomen, the proletariat, and other whites whose life was a dead end unless they were able to dominate and place beneath them a whole host of others, particularly nonwhites but also foreigners who had not yet "gained their whiteness." Imperialism and American exceptionalism's most insidious effect—next to conquering and colonizing people of color—was this wholesale conversion of millions of non-elite whites to do its work, inciting in them a sense of racial superiority over those to be conquered, marginalized, and segregated.

Early Mormonism—in my view—offered no support for such a worldview, but that soon changed as white Mormonism acquiesced to its whiteness as Americans on the backs of people of color. To justify

19. By "full evangelization," I simply mean their ability to be part of the Church in all aspects, from being simple members to being allowed to write, participate, construct spaces of faith, and lead at all levels.

these actions, we developed all kinds of religious-racist theories based on either false interpretation of scripture or selective commentary from earlier Christians who also harbored racist notions. These racial codes that developed among Mormons as they did among other Christian sects allowed them to fully integrate into white American society while still leaving a slight opening for proselyting efforts among people of color. Whether intentional or not, this fed into white racist thinking and rationalization. I use the term “racialist” instead of supremacy because the latter has a very insidious interpretation and, while I see prejudices and racism in some of the past leaders of the Church, their actions though at times very disappointing and discriminatory were not, in my view, systematically destructive as the actions of those who preached a blatant white supremacy. Some may see this as a fine line and it may well be, or there may be no line at all, but my own commitment to the faith and my experience with Mormonism allows me to believe that there was a line and that it prevented a wholesale crossing into rampant acts of violence and destruction at levels seen among other white groups. While some Mormon scholars have acknowledged and even condemned such surrender to whiteness, few have told the tragic story from the perspective of the victimized, and even fewer have sought to find successful or at least valiant resistance to this racialism.

Third, we must see and write about the Church’s opening to people of color in the last fifty years or so not as a logical evolution of God’s timetable, but as an all-too-slow realization by the Church that it had failed in the past to fully grasp its racial history and its insularity within the intermountain west and American society. In other words, the time was always right for Latinos and other people of color’s conversion and progression, but white members did not have their hearts and minds prepared to share the gospel space we are all trying to build. The course correction over the past few years has failed, however, to acknowledge the damage done and leaves uncorrected the theological foundations of a white Mormon superiority. This superiority continues to surface

in talks, administrative actions, and callings, and reveals itself clearly in the predominance of Utah and American Mormon traditions in the institutional culture of the Church.

Fourth, we need to look at Mormon history not in hierarchal or spatial terms—that is from top to bottom or core to periphery—but in terms of the people’s ability to live the faith within their own spheres. This would validate every Mormon community that lives the gospel according to its circumstances and its particular challenges and do away with the notion that these actions have to be filtered according to some rubric developed in Salt Lake City or by one part of the body of Christ. In this way, all Saints have the space to create their faith stories and their inspiring ancestry and help contribute to the story of Mormonism.²⁰

Again, I go back to the work by Fernando and Queta in bringing to light the lives and experience of Mexican Saints. The brown faces, the poorly constructed chapels, and the seeming lack of hierarchical leadership in the pictures cannot hide the vibrancy with which those Saints lived the gospel. They also had pioneers, miracle workers, prophets and a vision of what the gospel could do in their country. Yet, their story, as told by historians and writers, is either a story of “humility and subservience to institutional leadership,” or one of rebellion and unsuccessful ministry; rarely do we interpret their lives in ways that do not reduce them to a footnote in white missionary or leaders’ history. They remain props and backdrops to the stories of white Mormons’ spiritual journeys. Individuals such as the Rivera sisters, Eduardo Balderas, Orlando Rivera, Dolores Torres, Emma Bautista, José García, and thousands of others who served faithfully and diligently have passed into history without much mention of their activities and without our knowledge of their thoughts and their spiritual and religious contributions to the whole, thus making their people voiceless, ahistorical, and insignificant. Without

20. I have written about the effect this hierarchical approach has had on Latinos, and many years after the circumstances I have described this approach continues to be the norm. See my “Empowering Latino Saints.”

them and the countless other tales of Latinos and Saints of color we do not really know how the Mormon gospel has impacted people throughout the world. All we know of them is that they once served under or were served by white leadership and that they simply “echoed” the words of those who led them. Mormon history has been about one group speaking and all others simply repeating. All discoveries, interpretations, creative leadership, or missionary success have come from only one group if we are to believe most of Mormon history as written today.

The story of Latino Mormons is as complex as any, and because issues of race, ethnicity, national origin, and white domination are front and center in their history, our current approaches simply cannot capture the full significance of their gospel experience. The same can be said of the histories of other Saints of color. Latino history must be seen from the ground up: the focus should be on the impact the gospel principles had on their immediate lives and on the decisions they made within their own spheres. Joseph Smith, the First Vision, the Book of Mormon, the proximity of God to humanity, and other gospel teachings have to be interpreted through the lenses of “borders”—colonialism, marginalization, immigration or migration, military or hostile conquest, the dark skin/white skin binary, secular and scriptural racialism, and the often-false expectations of equality both within and without the Church. The development of native leadership, the perception of visions and miracles, and the “gathering of Saints” has been a constant struggle—though not always publicly perceived or acknowledged—between those with lived gospel experience within their communities and white leadership, which has often prioritized institutional and theological fidelity.

The story of Mormon proselytizing among Latinos and people of color may have included all of the aforementioned, but it has also been a story of personal progress; communal solidarity; social, cultural, and sometimes economic upward mobility; leadership development; stability and order—the latter important particularly for the destitute and marginalized who often need a sense of purpose and order. Religion

exacts a high price but can often deliver what secular institutions cannot. Having been a Mormon from early childhood, I have seen the promises, blessings, and benefits of Mormonism, and that is why I believe that my people and other Saints of color hold steadfastly to the LDS gospel. And, of course, as a believer I fully witness to what a truly Christian life can mean to someone searching for meaning in their lives. But we'll only fully understand that meaning when we uncover more profoundly the history of that search and better understand the lived gospel experience of more than one group.

Accepting different conceptualizations of Mormon history that recognize the experiences of Latino and other Saints of color does not in any way challenge Church doctrines or the fundamentals of our faith, but it will help us create a theology more consistent with the gospel message we preach. This approach also does not demean or lessen the significance of the early history of the Church. In fact, it affirms that what we believe has a commonality because it is a gospel message based on God's love, and that love is for people of all colors, ethnicities, and national origins—that all have a place in the mosaic of Mormon history.

At the same time, I reiterate that we cannot simply settle for an integration of our history into the “as-written” history of Mormonism, because if we do, Latino Mormon history will simply disappear into the larger narrative as did early immigrant history in this country and in the Church. Without new historical paradigms for the multiplicity of Mormon experience, the Church membership may get browner, but the history, theology, and practices will remain inherently white.

Mormonism should leave behind the melting pot metaphor and even the salad bowl one, the former because it forces Saints of color to tamper their cultural experiences to enhance the story of the dominant group and the latter because the lettuce (white Mormonism) remains the most visible within the bowl of the church and thus the most influential. We must see the worldwide membership as a vegetable garden in which each plant (ethnicity) requires its separate plot of dirt, needs its own

particular care, is allowed to develop in its own time and season, and is validated within its sphere for its contribution to the whole.

Only when we are able to write a history that encompasses but doesn't co-opt or overwhelm the past of each group of Saints will we be able to truly tell the story of the Latter-day Saint people. Then maybe one day some bishop or Relief Society president of color will turn to someone and say "Isn't it wonderful that couples of different colors, ethnicities, and national origins create such wonderful little Saints?"

Talking about a change, however, without true institutional and individual support is not enough. Current Church history has evolved over time, nurtured and supported by Church leaders, Church money, Church educational institutions, and Church publishing outlets. Given that Latinos and other Saints of color are yet to become a big buying and reading market for Mormon studies, and that few academic and intellectual Saints of color exist currently, the rest of Mormonism must help pick up the slack. We must provide funding for conferences on Latino Saints and other Saints of color, offer internships and mentorships to bring them into the field, and teach this history so it can attract new contributors.

The Church History Department must also be expanded, with new Latino staff and researchers, and other people of color hired as they become available, and, eventually but not too long in the future, the Church should seriously consider a Latino or other Saint of color for associate historian and a General Authority of color to preside over it. The reality is that Church history of the future will be about the international Church, of which Saints of color will be the overwhelming majority, and we need people who have lived, are living, feel attached to, and value that particular history—sometimes regardless of their ethnicity or color—and who support new historical paradigms in Mormon history.

Mormon intellectuals and Church leaders must vouch for this history and support its theological contributions, or white Saints and some Saints of color are likely to see it as a "dumbing down" of the heroic

history of Mormonism, and we will lose their support. Mormonism also cannot simply go from being a white religion to being an ethnic or racial one. When all things are fair, I don't believe that God cares—nor should we—about color, ethnicity, or national origin. Mormonism should strive to be—in the way it tells its story—the religion that it was intended to be when the gospel was revealed in this new dispensation. And that will only happen when we apply a historical perspective that allows all of God's children to know and tell their story in their own way. Maybe then, we won't really need to worry about color and the pecking order in heaven. After all, we'll probably all be brown anyway.



Tyler Swain
Plums From Above
oil on panel, 18"x18"

CAN MORMONS BE WHITE IN AMERICA?

Robert A. Goldberg

The emerging field of whiteness studies in the US asks some provocative questions: How do outsiders lay claim to citizenship? How do minorities shed their image as un-American? How do they, in other words, become white, with all the economic, political, and social privileges associated with that status?

The concept of race is elastic, evolving, and a social construction that changes over time. It is not a biological category. Thus, scholars have determined that if white is a color, then white people are also people of color. It also may explain how Japanese-Americans, just seventy years ago evacuated in time of war and interned in camps, might now claim whiteness. Whiteness is not only inheritable, but also achievable. Conceptualize this as a dance, a symbiotic movement where the larger community accepts a minority group only as it adapts to the larger culture.¹

So, we can ask, despite their image of wholesome Americanism, can Mormons lay claim to full citizenship? Are they white in America? Or do perceptions of Mormons as cultish, unChristian, and authoritarian

1. On whiteness, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998); David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 2007); Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007).

deny them tolerance, acceptance, and their claims to the privileges of whiteness? What is the role of popular culture in this process? Do Mormons behave in ways that deny them the traditional path that outsiders have taken to become insiders?

Let's think first about the idea of a white race or Caucasian people. In school, we learned that America is a melting pot or a salad bowl—that out of many immigrant nations emerged one people, one nation. Such a concept of whiteness, however, is a mid-twentieth century construct. You would not be surprised that white Americans marked black, brown, yellow, and red peoples as inferior. But, historians are drawn to the intense energy that late-nineteenth-century nativists expended, in response to the massive waves of immigration from Europe, to create a hierarchy of seemingly similar peoples. Americans delineated sharply between Anglo-Saxon, Nordic, Mediterranean, Teutonic, Celtic, Hebrew, and Slavic peoples, among many others. Each was a race with its own physical markers—the outer signs of moral and intellectual character. These signs revealed who was fit for American citizenship and rights and who was not.

Thus, Americans viewed Anglo-Saxons as having a high moral and cultural sense, larger brains, and a gift for constitutional law. The Irish were seen as in a “condition of depravity,” reflected in their low-browed appearance with “black tint of skin” and brutish, even simian behavior. They were submissive to their priests and worshiped them as “demigods.” Along with their “brutal natures,” Italians were seen as weak-minded, cowardly, dark, and lawless. Low receding foreheads, repulsive countenances, and slovenly attire marked their appearance. As they did with the Irish, many observers mediated these claims about Italians and also Poles with reference to the Catholic Church. Inferiority was inseparable from their faith. Benighted immigrants were victims of a papist conspiracy that kept them in ignorance and manipulated their genetic weaknesses for its own purposes. Hebrews with their “chameleonic blood” were believed to be mongrels, greedy, clannish, with an

“animal jaw,” bulging eyes, and “a ravenous appetite for the forbidden fruit.” In the words of sociologist Edward Ross, all of these immigrants were “beaten members of beaten breeds.”² Their failure and their threat were hereditary—a factor of birth, “inside the seeds of the breeds.” Marriage with the native-born would bring offspring that degenerate to the basest partner.³

According to the research of historian W. Paul Reeve, nineteenth-century Protestants racialized Mormons as well, deeming them unwhite and degenerate. An 1860 US Senate report based upon the observations of Dr. Robert Bartholow, a doctor with the Utah expedition observed: “The yellow, sunken cadaverous visage, the greenish colored eyes, the thick protuberant lips, the low forehead, the light yellowish hair, and the lank, angular person constitutes an appearance so characteristic of the new race . . . as to distinguish them at a glance.”⁴ Given to violence, unnatural lust, conspiracy, secrecy, and despotism, they posed a danger to true Americans. In this context, the Mountain Meadows Massacre, perpetrated with Native American confederates, was hardly surprising. Note that Mormons also thought of themselves in racial terms. Polygamy, said Mormon leader George Q. Cannon, gave birth in the Great Basin to a superior “race,” with “the complexion of angels.”⁵ Along with Reeve, religious studies scholar Max Mueller’s research suggests that anti-black

2. Edward Alsworth Ross, *Foundations of Sociology*, 5th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 393.

3. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 49, 66, 70; Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 23, 33, 52, 67, 123; Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 28.

4. Quoted in W. Paul Reeve, *Religion of a Different Color: Race and the Mormon Struggle for Whiteness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 15; Reeve, email correspondence with author, Aug. 29, 2011.

5. *Ibid.*, 10.

pronouncements and changes in the LDS Church's official racial policy were a means to distance its members from blacks and claim whiteness.⁶

In 1924, the US Congress passed new immigration legislation that made racial coding law. Quotas were imposed on the unwanted immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe to maintain the racial balance of 1890, the time before it was upset by millions of arrivals at Ellis Island. The new law helped construct a white race in several ways. If curtailing unwanted immigration, it still separated those who were eligible for citizenship from those who had no chance of entering the United States. Japanese, Chinese, and Africans were assigned no quotas and were prohibited from immigrating. The law effectively curtailed immigration from Europe and at the same time sped the whitening of peoples. First-generation immigrants died off, not to be replaced, Little Italies, Little Warsaws, and Little Jerusalems emptied as sons and daughters moved to the suburbs, native languages and old-world ways languished. In the voracious maws of public education and mass media, the second and third generations became American in thought and habit. With citizenship came the vote, and political parties were now attentive to these new constituencies' needs and interests.

Also, enhancing this transformation from races to nationalities to ethnic groups were federal policies in the 1930s and 1940s that discriminated against black Americans while protecting the jobs and homes of white Americans. Labor unions welcomed the immigrants and their children while excluding African-Americans. Residential covenants proscribed eligible neighbors along black-white lines. Recruiters during World War II recognized a collective whiteness by segregating blacks in their own army units and denying them enlistment in the Marines. The Red Cross even segregated black and white blood supplies. The horrors of the Holocaust in Europe and a rejection of Nazi racial theories also

6. Max Mueller, conversation with author, Aug. 23, 2011. See also, Max Perry Mueller, *Race and the Making of the Mormon People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

solidified the white race in America. In the 1950s and 1960s, the challenge of a black movement for social, economic, and political equality accelerated the odyssey to white privilege. Race, by the mid-twentieth century, had been recast as color. Ethnicity—differences in culture—defined the members of a now functional white family.⁷

Let us add sociology to history. What processes transformed outsiders into insiders? Sociologists identify acculturation as key to inclusion: minority groups adopting the host society's values, beliefs, and behaviors. Acculturated men and women abandon the old ways to speak English, celebrate national holidays, learn American history, participate in civic activities, accept child-rearing practices, and adapt dress styles. They identify as Americans, an experience that accelerates in the second and third generations. Acculturation facilitates the next step to inclusion: large-scale entrance into primary relationships, including friendships, dating, club and church membership, neighborhoods, and rest homes that allow personal, intimate, and face-to-face contact with the host community members. Assimilation then follows over time—intermarriage replaces endogamy, or marriage within the ethnic or religious group. In the end, broad acculturation and structural and marital assimilation lead to inclusion and a decline in prejudice and discrimination. If the rewards are great, so too is the price. Success dictates a decline in diversity and significance, and even disappearance of the ethnic group.⁸

In the 1940s and 1950s, sociologists collected data on eastern communities that indicated that acculturation had occurred in dramatic fashion. At the same time, Americans opted to cocoon themselves in primary groups based far less on nationality and more upon religious affiliation. More than three-fourths of Jews indicated that all or most of their close friends were Jewish. Eighty percent of Catholic parochial

7. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 157–98.

8. See Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964) for a summary of this literature.

school students had either all or two Catholics as their three best friends. For marriage partners, men and women looked to their own church or synagogue. Eighty percent of Protestants, 84 percent of Irish and Polish Catholics, and 94 percent of Jews married within their religious group. Compare this to a 91 percent endogamy rate within nationality groups in 1870 falling to 64 percent in 1940. In light of their studies, sociologists in the 1960s posited a triple melting pot scenario for white Americans. That is, Catholics befriended and married Catholics and Jews befriended and married Jews in concert with economic class. White Protestants behaved similarly with what one scholar called a “consciousness of kind.” African-Americans, meanwhile, remained confined in a segregated pot regardless of religious affiliation. Sociologists predicted the declining significance of religion in determining friendships and marriage partners among white Americans. They cited data that showed generational change with younger Americans more receptive to intermarriage across religious lines and affiliation with host society primary groups.⁹

History charts specifics about the movement of outsiders to the inside. Remember, this is a dance. The minority group acts and reacts, accommodating and acculturating to ease its path. At the same time, the majority measures these actions and reactions and weighs claims to whiteness. In making a case about Mormons, I have selected another religious group that has been cast in even darker colors and denied citizenship for a longer time. What insights can we glean from the experience of Irish, Polish, and Italian Catholics to answer the question: Can Mormons be white in America?

Catholics have been one of the most feared and detested groups in American history. They have suffered prejudice, discrimination, and violence. I will offer a few illustrations of anti-Catholic bigotry and suggest the changing dynamic that brought Catholics in from the cold.

9. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, 53, 122–23, 179, 214.

The Catholic-Protestant wars are European-born and centuries old. Anti-Catholic prejudice came to America with the first colonists to God's New Israel. Americans excoriated Catholics for their devotion to a false church that preached a "paganistic creed with its worship of the Virgin Mary, dead saints, images, bones, and other relics."¹⁰ More importantly, nativists accused Catholics of placing their allegiance to the pope above their loyalty to the United States. Nativists wove a narrative that depicted a tyrannical pope and a people enslaved to the Catholic Church. Ever ready to expand his power, the "tyrant of the Tiber" had long coveted Protestant America. With Catholic votes, he would elect men to do his bidding. Catholics had no choice but to obey the pope. Enslaved by the secrets they had disclosed in the confessional, they were herded to the polls and voted as commanded. Once the Catholic hierarchy had control of the American government, it would end the separation of church and state, ban the Bible, and destroy the freedoms of speech, press, and religion. The sins of the Catholic Church were not merely political. "Its whole energy," insisted Presbyterian minister Edward Beecher, "has been put forth to corrupt the principles and debauch the morals of mankind. . . . It has deluged the nations with the blood of saints."¹¹

Central to the plot was the parish priest. He commanded the pope's foot soldiers and countenanced no dissent. He ordered the marshaling of guns and ammunition and had them ready for revolution in the basement of his church. He administered the parochial school curriculum and promoted its un-American message. And as revealed in exposés by escaped "ex-nuns," he succumbed to the pleasures of the flesh and ordered the offspring of priestly lust strangled and then concealed on church property.

10. Quoted in Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, *The Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 125.

11. Edward Beecher, *The Papal Conspiracy Exposed: And Protestantism Defended in the Light of Reason, History, and Scripture* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1855), 411.

Anti-Catholicism has been a recurrent feature in American history. Serious outbreaks of prejudice occurred in the 1850s with the Know-Nothing party, the 1890s with the American Protective Association, and 1920s with the Ku Klux Klan. When New York governor Al Smith campaigned for the presidency in 1928, he faced a firestorm of bigotry, a key factor in his defeat.

In the 1930s and 1940s, during the Great Depression and World War II, anti-Catholicism began to recede. In part, this was related to the acculturation of Catholic ethnic populations. In addition, a series of events and individuals acted to change Protestant opinion about Catholics. Rather than being perceived as enemies within, Catholics gained acceptance as loyal Americans and defenders of the nation's basic values. Key to this also was the transformation of the image of the Catholic priest from an agent of papist intrigue to a benevolent leader in tune with 100 percent Americanism.

In response to a wave of what it considered indecent and immoral motion pictures, Catholic leaders in the early 1930s organized the National Legion of Decency. It asked parishioners to take the pledge and refuse to attend films that glorified crime, menaced the home and youth, and denied country and religion. Hollywood, concerned about declining revenues in hard times, was receptive and inaugurated a rating system that anointed films with a Production Code Administration seal of approval. The Code remained in effect for decades.

Film historian Anthony Smith points to an even more important phenomenon regarding Hollywood that showed "the value of Catholicism for the wider nation."¹² The 1930s and 1940s, he argues, saw a series of commercially and critically successful films that reinterpreted Catholicism to the American public and accelerated Catholic progress

12. Anthony Burke Smith, *The Look of Catholics: Portrayals in Popular Culture from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 18. See also, Colleen McDannell, ed., *Catholics in the Movies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

to whiteness. Produced, directed, and populated by Catholic stars, these films ignored the pope and hierarchy of the church. Instead, they championed Catholic heroes who worked hard to shore up community and home, and who battled for social justice in a time of economic crisis and war. In 1938, Spencer Tracy starred as Father Flanagan in *Boys Town*. The film, based on a true story, chronicles the work of Edward J. Flanagan in helping homeless boys regardless of race, creed, or color. Repeatedly, he reminds viewers that there is “no such thing as a bad boy.” The film received critical acclaim and Tracy won an Oscar for his performance. In 1940, James Cagney and Pat O’Brien starred in *The Fighting 69th*, a tale of a traditionally Irish-American unit in World War I. The film focuses on O’Brien as Father Duffy, the regimental chaplain who, as the movie tells viewers, is “the epitome of our national courage” and “a truly great humanitarian.” In the film, Catholics come to the colors and shed their blood in defense of the nation. Tolerance and pluralism are the watchwords, but the Catholic director showed no reluctance in depicting Catholic iconography. All is wrapped in the flag; as Father Duffy reminds the audience, “I’m a soldier as well as a priest.” To drive the point home, the camera scans a cemetery with Irish names on wooden crosses.

The winner of seven Academy Awards in 1944, *Going My Way* continued the process of transforming priests into heroes and Catholics into good citizens. Bing Crosby portrays Father O’Malley of St. Dominic’s Church. We glimpse him first in white collar and straw skimmer with rosary close at hand. He is, to use the parlance of the time, a “regular” guy. He plays stickball with the kids, has a St. Louis Browns sweatshirt, knows the golf course, is kind to the elderly, adores puppies, is a bit of a klutz, and sings. His accent has no trace of the Irish brogue and is Midwestern. He is modern and acculturated. This priest is in soft focus, a man who is gentle, kind, safe, and upbeat. The film shows no reticence about its Catholicism, with Crosby appearing in cassock, singing *Ave Maria*, wearing a crucifix, and displaying Jesus of the Sacred Heart prominently on the wall. In destroying myths, the film even confronts

the specter of the dreaded church basement, long suspected as serving as the Catholic armory. The basement at St. Dominic's is more prosaic than sinister—a storage space for old furniture, with exposed pipes and hanging laundry. Crosby opens this Catholic space for rehearsals of the boys' choir.

John Ford's Cavalry trilogy of *Fort Apache*, *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, and *Rio Grande* deserves attention here. Ford stations stereotypic Irish men in the Army forts during the Indian Wars, guardians who carried the standard and fought for their country. Let us also remember the combat films of World War II. Among the stock characters of the US Army platoon was the wisecracking Italian or Polish or Irish kid from the big city. The Catholics, Americans all, were boys who became men in defense of their country.

The cast of new national Catholics appeared off-screen as well. Father Charles Coughlin, the radio priest, abandoned his program for children to fulminate against communism, socialism, and international bankers, and to support the New Deal and Franklin Roosevelt. At the height of his popularity and before beginning an anti-Semitic chant about an international Jewish bankers' conspiracy, his listening audience was estimated at between thirty and forty million people. Joseph McCarthy, the US senator from Wisconsin, made the anticommunism cause his own and enlisted Catholics in the fight against the reds. William F. Buckley founded the *National Review*, which became the intellectual center of American conservatism. He and the magazine's commentators preached in support of traditional morality, a strong national defense, and the institutions of church and family. Bishop Fulton J. Sheen appeared weekly on television during the 1950s in a show called *Life is Worth Living*. For five seasons, dressed in his bishop's robes, he talked to all Americans about motherhood, family, and faith. Here was, in Arthur Smith's words, "Americanism with specifically Catholic accents."¹³

13. Smith, *The Look of Catholics*, 141.

As Catholic acculturation progressed, the work of these American advocates of Catholic faith and patriotism prepared the ground for John F. Kennedy. Their efforts over twenty years outlined the text of his speech on religion to Protestant ministers during the 1960 presidential campaign. In his address, Kennedy declared his independence of papal authority on policy matters while testifying to his loyalty to the United States. Kennedy confronted well-known Protestant fears, asserted his belief in the separation of church and state, and announced specifically that the national interest and not the Catholic hierarchy would dictate his positions on birth control, divorce, and public funding of parochial schools. He also noted that at the battle of the Alamo there was “no religious test,” that Catholics were among the Texans who died defending liberty. Even more powerful, he reminded his audience of World War II and the death of his older brother, along with his own combat service in the South Pacific. His message was clear: Catholics had stood with other Americans in crisis and proven their devotion to country.¹⁴

The Kennedy presidency, and perhaps more importantly his martyrdom, facilitated acceptance of Catholics as white in the wider American society. As individuals and in organizations, they were welcomed into the New Right of the 1970s. Opposition to *Roe v. Wade*, gay rights, and the Equal Rights Amendment gave them common ground with other conservatives in defending the family and traditional gender roles. The immigrant saga of Ellis Island claimed a bootstrap history of independence and community support without federal aid and conditioned their entrance into conservative coalitions. Even the persistently anti-Catholic Ku Klux Klan welcomed them into its ranks in the 1970s, a sure sign that Catholics had attained whiteness in America.

Facilitating this acceptance were changes in the pan-ethnic Catholic melting pot. The Catholic Church had long pressed to expand territorial

14. John F. Kennedy, “Transcript: JFK’s Speech on His Religion, September 12, 1960,” *NPR*, Dec. 5, 2007, www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16920600.

parishes based on area and phrase out national parishes with their own languages and traditions. Closing down these way stations encouraged acculturation and Americanization. Meanwhile, the parochial school system, which reached its high point in the 1960s with more than 13,000 institutions and five million students, went into rapid decline. The easing of anti-Catholic sentiment, the decline in the immigrant population, suburbanization, and rising costs led to the closure of thousands of schools. By the end of the twentieth century, 5,800 schools and three million students had been lost. Acculturation and acceptance into primary groups brought economic and social mobility, and Catholics in large numbers joined corporate boards, university faculties, and medical and law practices. Acceptance also affected rates of intermarriage beyond the nationality and religious group. By the early twenty-first century, almost 40 percent of Catholics married partners outside their faith, a 20 percent increase from the 1950s. In recognition of this new reality, the Catholic Church no longer requires as a precondition to marriage that children be raised in the faith but rather that a spouse's Catholic beliefs be respected. On a related note, Jewish intermarriage rates reached more than 50 percent by the 1990s.¹⁵

The construction of whiteness is symbiotic. It requires mutual change and action on the part of both the minority and majority. Acculturation is a necessary but not sufficient first step. Catholics crafted new images of themselves that calmed fears and revised perceptions. At least on film and television screens, who but a priest would you call to bust ghosts or wrestle with demonic possession? In combat, Catholics proved their loyalty as Americans. They gave their martyred son John Kennedy as a sacrifice to the nation. In right-wing causes, they made alliances with

15. Benjamin T. Philips and Sylvia Barack Fishman, "Ethnic Capital and Intermarriage: A Case Study of American Jews," *Sociology of Religion* 67, no. 4 (2006): 492; Andy Smarick, "Can Catholic Schools be Saved?," *National Affairs*, Spring 2011, <https://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/can-catholic-schools-be-saved>; Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White*, 159.

their erstwhile enemies. Meanwhile, Catholic self-segregation and reliance on faith-based primary groups gave way to associations with those outside the ethnic and religious core. Catholics also made peace with pluralism, and the war with Protestants for converts became less intense and divisive.

With the Catholic example as context, let us return to the Mormons and gauge whether they have completed their journey to acceptance and whiteness.

Mormons were more than a racialized group in the nineteenth century. They also confronted a federal government determined to repress what it considered to be a criminal conspiracy to subvert the separation of church and state and an immoral threat that struck at the core of American values. In the 1850s, a military expedition advanced on Utah to bring defiant Mormon leaders to heel. Federal officers waged war on polygamists, with criminal prosecutions spanning decades. Supplementing these measures against Utah, local Protestant vigilantes in the South attacked Mormon missionaries for spreading the word of a false church and luring away the ignorant.

In the 1890s, the LDS Church began a slow surrender, with capitulation completed by World War I. In return for security from attack and a space to survive, the LDS community retreated on polygamy and uprooted its economic and political stakes in the Utah community. Like the defeated Japanese after World War II, the Mormons sought reconciliation and acculturated to the victors' demands. This meant an intense devotion to country as well as a distancing from Mormon communitarian roots.

Insulated and isolated by mountains, deserts, and distance—and with time softening animosities—the image of the Latter-day Saints changed in the American mind. Rather than an outlaw group of cultists, Americans recognized the Mormons as western pioneers and fixed on church teachings that proscribed alcohol, coffee, and tobacco and promoted genealogy. Since the 1890s, the Mormon Tabernacle Choir

has served as a good will ambassador to the nation and eased concerns with its repertoire of traditional Christian and patriotic music. During the Great Depression, the Mormon welfare system drew much attention as a potential solution to the economic crisis. Mormon leader Ezra Taft Benson joined the cabinet of the Eisenhower administration in the 1950s and in the 1960s encouraged Mormons to participate in national conservative groups. Lyndon Johnson not only visited Mormon leaders twice during the 1964 campaign, but also requested that the Tabernacle Choir sing at his inauguration. Utah joined the rest of the nation in 1964 in electing Johnson and rejecting Arizona senator Barry Goldwater's bid for the White House. If the LDS Church raised any controversy, it was the denial of the priesthood to black male members. At a time of racial change and challenge, this was a defiant claim to whiteness. However, as historian J. B. Haws suggests, at the end of the 1960s, the Mormons were "less opposed than obscure."¹⁶ They were simply members of the Christian family of believers.¹⁷

As Catholics, Protestants, and Jews settled in their pan-ethnic melting pots, so, too, did Mormons. Church callings drew Saints deep into their tribe and absorbed religious, economic, and social energies. Mormon ward houses or congregations became self-contained, all-purpose community centers. In addition to serving as places of worship, they hosted sporting events, dances, socials, playgroups, political meetings, and men's and women's organizations. Mormons in good standing also tithed to

16. John Ben Haws, "The Meaning of 'Mormon' in the American Mind: Shaping Public Perceptions of Latter-Day Saints, 1968–2008" (PhD diss., University of Utah, 2010), 32–50, 64–66. This work was later published as J. B. Haws, *The Mormon Image in the American Mind: Fifty Years of Public Perception* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

17. See Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-Day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Ferenc Morton Szasz, *Religion in the Modern American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000); Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

their church. Such activities do not distinguish Mormons from other religious groups in the 1960s that were similarly inward-looking and tribal. But would Mormons be able to breach the high walls of separation and use their acculturation skills to assimilate?

While other religious groups made peace with pluralism, Mormons continued and would expand their intensive campaign for converts. The LDS Church claimed one million members for the first time in 1947. By 1963, it had two million on its rolls, and in 1971, three million. While many joined the Church in foreign nations, the great majority were Americans. In part, this was the work of an expanding recruiting army that listed 2,132 missionaries in 1947 and by 1965 almost tripled that number. Stressing the importance of conversion work to his church, President David O. McKay called all to the war for souls: "every member a missionary."¹⁸ The Mormon offensive would not go unchallenged.

By the end of the 1960s, Mormons had for the most part found acceptance, or at least indifference or ignorance. Perhaps this is why George Romney's brief run for the Republican Party's nomination for president was mostly devoid of prejudice and commotion. Romney, a sixty-year-old former automobile executive, governor of Michigan, and devout member of the LDS Church, declared his candidacy in 1967: "We need leadership that can again elevate religion and morality to their position of paramount importance and thus eliminate growing selfishness, immorality, and materialism."¹⁹ Gallup pollsters asked voters about Romney's Mormonism and determined that 17 percent would oppose him on religious grounds and that 75 percent of Americans had no concerns.²⁰

18. Haws, "Meaning of 'Mormon,'" 41–43, 63–64.

19. Anthony Ripley, "Romney Declares He is in '68 Race," *New York Times*, November 19, 1967, 1, 62.

20. Thomas B. Edsall, "Will Anti-Mormon Sentiment Cost Romney GOP Nomination?," *Huffington Post*, June 7, 2007, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2007/06/07/thomas-b-edsall-will-anti_n_51232.html.

Romney believed his greatest hurdle to the presidency was, in his words, "I'm not as well known as I could be."²¹ Others observed that the Michigan governor had to contend with the growing conservative element in the GOP that he had antagonized in 1964 by refusing to support party nominee Barry Goldwater. Some suggested that the ambitious Richard Nixon might be the stumbling block.

Most significantly, however, neither he nor commentators raised his faith as a barrier to the presidency. Even on racial matters, Romney met no resistance, for as governor he had been a civil rights advocate. He captured one-third of the African-American vote in his run for the state house in 1966. Romney was open about his Mormonism. He did not smoke, drink, or campaign on Sundays. Newspapers noted that Romney was a former missionary and had been born in a Mormon settlement in Mexico. The *New York Times* praised him as a model of "personal rectitude" with "innermost religious conviction."²² The press focused on his efforts to bring economic recovery to Michigan and his fiscally responsible record as governor. Romney did not have to engage in defensive counter-punching regarding his independence from LDS Church authorities or the tenets of his Christian faith. Polls in April 1967 had him beating Lyndon Johnson by a margin of 54 to 46 percent. When he withdrew from the race because of his "brainwashed" comment about the Vietnam War, the *New York Times* offered the one religious stereotype that I could find: Romney had "confounded those who had thought his Mormon religious background would not permit him to 'quit' so soon."²³

21. Ripley, "Romney," 62.

22. Tom Wicker, "Impact of Romney Move," *New York Times*, February 29, 1968, 23.

23. Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President 1968* (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1969), 47; Robert Semple, "Romney Decision Urged by Aides," *New York Times*, February 29, 1968, 17; Wicker, "Impact of Romney Move."

Soon after, however, the religious and political landscape changed in the United States. The 1970s saw a fourth Great Awakening in American history and a religious upsurge in the public square. Looking for news that God had reentered history and that the prophetic clock had again begun to tick, Evangelical Christians focused on the Jews, God's "time pieces" in the end times. First the birth of Israel in 1948 and then the recapture of Jerusalem in 1967 convinced the faithful that the second coming was at the door. There were other signs of the end times: rising lawlessness and materialism, growing sexual promiscuity, and earthquakes and floods of great intensity. The call went out to spread the Gospel to secure souls and morally reclaim America as God's sword in the world.²⁴

At the same time, the LDS Church continued to raise its profile and intensify its efforts to be a change agent beyond Utah and the Great Basin. In 1974, the Washington D.C. Temple was opened, with temples in Atlanta, Dallas, Denver, and Chicago following in the 1980s. In the 1990s, President Gordon B. Hinckley appeared several times on national television to explain Mormonism to viewers. He also launched a massive building campaign that more than doubled the number of temples to 120 and saw Mormon membership jump from nine to twelve million. Meanwhile, the LDS missionary effort ballooned, and the church became international in scope.

Evangelicals countered their competitors. They denied the Christianity of Mormons, a theological conflict that first emerged with the founding of the LDS Church. Beyond theology were accusations of sheep-stealing and a struggle for authority in the secular world. The competition has been telling. Political and social activists on the left also mediated perceptions of Mormons and the LDS community for a national audience. Opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s and 1980s earned Mormons the wrath of feminists and liberals.

24. Robert Alan Goldberg, *Enemies Within: The Culture of Conspiracy in Modern America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001), 66–104.

The LDS Church's opposition to gay rights has led LGBT proponents to brand it the leading homophobic exponent in the United States.

An LDS Church-commissioned poll recorded that in 1991, 37 percent of Americans ranked Mormons unfavorably while only 18 percent had a similar opinion in 1977. As J. B. Haws writes, "When those who expressed no opinion were removed from the study, the results were even more dramatic: 'Nearly six out of ten people who had an opinion of the Mormon Church said their impression was a negative one.'"²⁵ Recall that in 1967, only 17 percent of Americans would vote against a qualified Mormon running for president. A poll in December 2006 found that 53 percent of Americans would feel "very uncomfortable or have some reservations" about voting for a presidential candidate who is Mormon.²⁶

Meanwhile, Mormon convert Glenn Beck, in parallel to radio priest Father Coughlin, gathered a large following first on radio and then on television. Many who have in the past been most receptive to anti-Mormon claims follow his lead. His populist jeremiads implore supporters of family and church to join gold and guns enthusiasts in an alliance to thwart the New World Order conspiracy. LDS Church member Stephen Covey has won praise and perhaps enhanced stereotypes of a hyper-organized Mormon community in his efforts to keep the world on track with popular books such as *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. On a lighter note, generations of Osmonds sing and dance their way into the hearts of Americans.²⁷

Mormons have also frequently been portrayed in the entertainment media. A much-watched 2003 episode of the television cartoon series *South Park* lampooned the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith.

25. Haws, "Meaning of 'Mormon,'" 337.

26. Ibid., 432–33.

27. Alexander Zaitchik, *Common Nonsense: Glenn Beck and the Triumph of Ignorance* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2010); Mark Lilla, "The Beck of Revolution," *New York Review of Books*, December 9, 2010, 16–20.

Still, the show concluded that even if Mormons are dupes, they are nice people in strong families. Jon Krakauer's *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith* appeared in 2005 and six years later had an Amazon.com national bestseller ranking of #1,510. Currently, its ranking is still a respectable #223,763. As the title indicates, Krakauer's Mormons are cultists and polygamists who have a tendency to commit murders. Helen Whitney's 2007 PBS special *The Mormons* was broadcast in primetime for four hours over two nights. Although praised for its more balanced portrayal of the LDS Church and community, inordinate time was still spent on the Mountain Meadows Massacre and polygamy, including footage on outlier Mormon sects. Commercial television focuses on what sells to Americans, and when it comes to Mormonism, polygamy sells. HBO's *Big Love* aired for five seasons beginning in 2006. Set in Utah, *Big Love* offered viewers a peek at the lifestyles of businessman and later state senator Bill Henrickson and his wives, Barb, Nicki, and Margene, as they manage the hurdles of living "The Principle." TLC's reality television series *Sister Wives* introduces audiences to salesman Kody Brown of Lehi, Utah and his wives, Meri, Janelle, Christine, and Robyn, and their sixteen children. The Brown family challenged Utah's anti-polygamy laws and was frequently seen on local and national news programs. TLC's companion reality show, *My Five Wives*, which aired for two seasons, focused on Utah polygamist Brady Williams, his five wives, and their combined twenty-five children. Is it any surprise that poll after poll indicates that for Americans, the description "Mormon" most strongly associates with the word "polygamy"? *South Park*'s creators opened on Broadway with the musical *The Book of Mormon* and won nine Tony Awards. This tale of missionaries in Africa tweaks Mormons about spiritual arrogance, racism, and homophobia. However, many Mormons agree with scholar Richard Bushman and are willing to take this "ribbing" in stride and

ask, “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if through this funny and outrageous show we got to know one another better?”²⁸

Could Mormon filmmakers, like their Catholic counterparts in the 1930s and 1940s, use the silver screen to counter hostility and project new images to a national audience? More than two dozen Mormon-made films have appeared since 2000, but so far, the opportunity to effect change has been lost. Mormon movies have been inward-looking, self-absorbed, amateurish in writing and production, and too keen to promote faith rather than understanding.

Zion Films produced *God’s Army* (2000), a story about young missionaries in Los Angeles. Earnest and ordinary, these men battle for souls offering a script for conversion and finding many eager for the word. In the genre of a buddy movie, the men learn from the experience, suffer crises, go beyond themselves, and bond with each other. Their faith is strengthened in the process and their testimonies renewed. *The Other Side of Heaven* (2001) recounts the experience of Elder John Groberg in Tonga during the 1950s. Instructed to learn the language and build the kingdom of God, Groberg risks life and limb for his church. He completes his mission with honor, having made a difference here and in the hereafter for those he worked to save. The romantic comedy *The Singles*

28. “All About Mormons,” *South Park*, Nov. 19, 2003; Jon Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of Violent Faith* (New York: Anchor, 2005); Helen Whitney, *The Mormons*, PBS American Experience and Frontline, Apr. 30 and May 1, 2007; *Big Love*, HBO, 2006–2011; *Sister Wives*, TLC, 2010–present; Jonathan Turley, “One Big, Happy Polygamous Family,” *New York Times*, July 20, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/21/opinion/21turley.html>; Gregory A. Prince, “Nixon Was Wrong: Religion and the Presidency, 1960, 2008, and 2012—An Interview with Shaun A. Casey,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 163; Jared Farmer, “Why *The Book of Mormon* (The Musical) is Awesomely Lame,” *Religion Dispatches*, www.religiondispatches.org/archives/culture/4743/why; Hal Boyd, “LDS Scholar Richard Lyman Bushman Talks ‘Mormon’ Musical,” *Deseret News*, Aug. 28, 2011, <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/700147768/LDS-scholar-Richard-Lyman-Bushman-talks-Mormon-musical.html>.

Ward (2002) expects its audience to have insider knowledge: Mormon community words, phrases, and jokes are never deciphered. The plot revolves around a devout and beautiful woman who will not commit to a handsome Mormon man who is unsure of his faith and tempted by the outside world. Once he finds balance, he is worthy and not only gets the girl but finds peace and contentment in church callings. The film offers a series of “didn’t you know he was a church member?” moments with Mormon sports celebrities doing cameo roles. Faith promotion is the theme of two movies that appeared in 2003. *The R.M.* and *The Best Two Years* remind Mormon audiences of how hard it is to be a missionary and how easy it is for young men to lose their spiritual fire. The cause of discontent is often the woman who promised to wait for her missionary’s return but was untrue. These are message films. Like World War II movies, they offer those on the home front a view of battle and advice about loved ones in the service. The comedy *The Home Teachers* (2004) reminds Mormon audiences that home teaching brings about conversion to the truth and a righteousness among the Saints. Like the other Mormon movies, *The Home Teachers* plays to the home crowd and has no patience for outsiders. Only seasoned Mormons could truly appreciate the jokes. Thus, a Mormon viewer who reviewed the film on Netflix’s website wrote: “My husband is a recent convert who didn’t understand the humor. . . . Needless to say, I don’t recommend this one to a non-member or a new member.” Another declared, perhaps more telling of the film’s intent, that the film is “not the best missionary tool or for new converts.”²⁹

In contrast to these films, the LDS Church’s official “I Am a Mormon” campaign, posted online and on billboards, shows Mormons as a warm and welcoming people of diversity with different origins and interests. It is too soon to measure the impact of this effort. But, in changing the image of Mormonism, Marlin Jensen observed in 2010: “Over the

29. Netflix.com, accessed Sept. 26, 2011.

twenty-one years that I have been an LDS Church general authority, I don't know if we have made much headway or not."³⁰

These Mormon-made movies can best be understood as mirrors. They reflect a close-knit, tightly integrated, and self-segregating community. Historian W. Paul Reeve wrote: "The hive is very busy with all kinds of commitments on Sunday but also during the week. It creates a natural social network that is focused inward and unintentionally and inadvertently exclusionary by its very nature." There is, as well, he writes, "an underlying mistrust among Mormons regarding 'outsiders' . . . an automatic defensive crouch."³¹ According to scholars Robert Putnam and David Campbell, Mormons score very high in "religious homogeneity," that is, they are more likely than other religious groups to have friends, family, and neighbors who are LDS. They concluded: "Mormons have an unusually high strength of religious identity, and share a distinctive culture. . . . They marry each other, live by each other, and associate with each other."³²

This is especially the case in Utah and the Mormon kingdom of the Great Basin, where LDS members have gathered to the suburbs. Here, Mormon neighborhoods are easily recognizable. In a sea of single, detached family homes are the raised spires of the numerous and identical ward houses. As in the nation of Israel, where the display of the national flag marks safe ground, the steeples headquarter enclaves that offer acceptance and haven. Wards for single people are the proper place

30. Quoted in Haws, "Meaning of 'Mormon,'" 473.

31. Reeve, email correspondence with author, Aug. 29, 2011

32. Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 524–26. When asked about intermarriage rates in the Mormon community, Brigham Young University Professor of Sociology Tim Heaton responded: "It is hard to get good data on this because samples have few Mormons and intermarriage is uncommon. The LDS Church does have data on membership status of couples but they are generally not willing to share" (Tim Heaton, email correspondence with author, Sept. 26, 2011).

to look inward and ensure a suitable match. Here Mormons remain in the world but insulated from it.

Mormon authority, if not always conscious, weighs heavily on those beyond these neighborhoods. For example, nearly every community in Utah is based on a grid that has a Mormon temple or church building as the origin from which all streets radiate and are counted. This not only privileges Mormonism, it makes the points of the compass signs of religious power.

Equally impressive is the omnipresence of Mormonism's beehive symbol. Its origin is the Book of Mormon, which tells of an ancient people who converted swarming honeybees—*deseret*—into a productive hive. According to an article in the *Deseret News*, a Mormon newspaper based in Salt Lake City, "it is a significant representation of the industry, harmony, order, and frugality of the people, and of the sweet results of their toil, union, and intelligent cooperation."³³ Mormon authorities have described the beehive as a "communal coat of arms," or a "motto," or "our emblem."³⁴ Then as now, it adorns the state flag, ward houses, public buildings, parade floats, the seals of both the University of Utah and private Brigham Young University, jewelry, quilts, furniture, tombstones, and state highway signs, among many other items. Songs and hymns feature the bees and hive. Utah is the Beehive State. Resonating with this, Salt Lake City's Triple-A minor league baseball team has undergone successive incarnations beginning as the Bees, then the Stingers, the Buzz, and now again the Bees. Curiously, Mormon patriarchs take note of the danger of drones but make

33. From *Deseret News*, Oct. 11, 1881. See Richard G. Oman, "Beehive Symbol," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, edited by Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 99, available at http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Beehive_Symbol.

34. Quoted in J. Michael Hunter, "The Mormon Hive: A Study of the Bee and Beehive Symbols in Nineteenth Century Mormon Culture" (PhD diss., California State University, Dominguez Hills, 2004), 108.

no mention of queen bees. The hive is a visual reminder of the past and symbolically references expectations today. For Mormons, it reinforces identity and goads individual enterprise with an eye on the collective. For those beyond the LDS Church, such symbols reinforce complaints of overweening cultural and political power and control.

Similarly, LDS missionary efforts fire resentment as a breaching of the religious truce in the United States. Official Mormon missionaries number approximately 70,000 men and women worldwide in 2017. But, as members of a proselytizing religion, Mormons are on the alert for converts. Recent acquaintances and even close friends must be wary that even a hint of interest in Mormonism will initiate a conversion script and an offer of a gift copy of the Book of Mormon. If sincere, Mormonism's truth claims deny the validity of others' religious experiences.³⁵ In pressing the battle for souls, Mormons play a zero-sum game with tolerance, sometimes a forgotten virtue. Thus, a 2007 Pew Research Center study on the religious landscape in the US found that while 82 percent of Jews, 79 percent of Catholics, and 66 percent of Protestants believe that many religions can lead to an eternal life, fewer than 40 percent of Mormons agree.³⁶ The response of those outside the Mormon community is clear. Putnam and Campbell suggest that groups that Americans view "coldly" are those with whom they "have little or no personal exposure." On their thermometer, three groups stand out as most unpopular: Mormons, Buddhists, and Muslims. If not specifically measuring whiteness, this focuses on which groups seem somehow alien or even suspect in twenty-first-century America.³⁷

35. Lee Davidson, "Church Unveils 16 New Questions for Prospective Mormon Missionaries to Ensure They Are Ready, Worthy and Able to Serve," *Salt Lake Tribune*, Oct. 21, 2017, <http://www.sltrib.com/religion/local/2017/10/20/church-unveils-16-new-questions-for-prospective-mormon-missionaries-to-ensure-they-are-ready-worthy-and-able-to-serve>.

36. Jessica Ravitz, "Most Americans Believe Salvation Achievable in Other Faiths," *Salt Lake Tribune*, June 28, 2008, <http://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=9722774&itype=NGPSID>.

37. Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 506–09, 534.

Mormons, by the second decade of this new century, have settled in a self-created, pan-ethnic beehive. This enclave exists physically in Utah and the Great Basin and mentally and spiritually in communities around the globe. They are interconnected. They are in their world but not of the world. The Beck, Covey, Hinckley, and Osmond phenomena fueled tolerance and even acceptance for Mormons. So, too, did Mitt Romney's 2008 and 2012 campaigns for US president. But rancor and hostility from beyond their community still affirms many Mormons' choice to gather with their own. A 2011 poll of one thousand Protestant ministers of all denominations revealed that 75 percent disagreed with the statement "I personally believe Mormons to be Christians." Evangelicals were more likely to strongly disagree, but even 50 percent of mainline ministers shared their view. At the same time, liberals decry the LDS Church as authoritarian and reject its stands on abortion, women's rights, and gay marriage. Against the rising tide, Mormons have turned their lives inward, with proselytizing being their most visible gesture to the outside world. Contact across the line is made in secondary relationships—between clients and professionals, students and teachers, customers and merchants. Friends and marriage partners are found within the Mormon tribe. While scoring high on acculturation values and behaviors, Mormons are less inclined to follow the Catholic and Jewish paths to broader primary group involvement, intermarriage, and whiteness.³⁸

Whiteness requires a willingness to leave behind the ethnic-religious beehive for broader primary group relationships and intermarriage.

38. Amy Sullivan, "Does Mitt Romney Have a Prayer with Evangelicals?," *Time*, June 3, 2011, <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2075677,00.html>; Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "McCain Surges in Polls, But Many Evangelicals Wary," *Christianity Today*, Feb. 4, 2008, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2008/february/106-12.0.html>; Dick Polman, "The American Debate: Romney Still Dogged by Religious Bigotry," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Oct. 13, 2011, http://www.philly.com/philly/columnists/dick_polman/20111013_The_American_Debate_Romney_still_dogged_by_religious_bigotry.html.

Religious groups must make peace with pluralism and resist the intense battle for souls. In this journey from the margins to the mainstream, individuals must come to terms not only with what they will gain but also what they will lose. Are Mormons willing to make that journey? Can they cope with the tension between being accepted and white while denying what has been defining and comfortable? Current scholarly observations about integration in mainstream primary groups and rates of intermarriage suggest the distance yet to travel. The continuing press of missionary work raises barriers and provokes animosity. So, too, does Mormon cultural and social authority beyond the local ward. Efforts to cast a non-sectarian image in popular culture remain weak. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, whiteness still eludes America's Mormons.

Yet the timing of Mormon acceptance and whiteness may only be delayed. Important to watch is the behavior of Mormon Millennials. Across denominations, Millennial women and men have proven to be more liberal in their social and political values and less prone to follow authorities. Perhaps their emergence will diminish Mormon cohesiveness and defensiveness while speeding entrance into primary groups beyond the hive.

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A GOSPEL CULTURE

Gina Colvin

The Pauline image of the body of Christ provides us with a gorgeous image that every part of the Church as it is expressed through the diverse cultures abroad are vital for its proper functioning. Bonhoeffer enlivens this image by suggesting that “Christ exists as community,”¹ and to my mind there is no one cultural community that is the vital organ for the whole body. Rather, the conditions for a living church are that all of its diverse parts are working, honored, and respected.

To paraphrase Paul: “the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now, if the New Zealand Church should say, ‘Because I am not Australian, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the Scottish Church should say, ‘Because I am not English, I do not belong to the body,’ it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were German, where would the sense of vibrancy be? If the whole body were European, where would the sense of color be? But in fact, God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The Chinese Church cannot say to the Japanese Church, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the Samoan Church cannot say to the

The author would like to thank Steve Maina, Director of the New Zealand Church Missionary Society for much of the inspiration for this paper following his excellent presentation at Laidlaw College, Christchurch, March 2017.

1. Joel Lawrence, *Bonhoeffer: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: A&C Black, 2010), 37.

Tongan Church, ‘I don’t need you!’ On the contrary, the South Pacific parts that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the African parts that we think are less honorable should be treated with special honor. And the South American parts that seem unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while the presentable parts like the big and wealthy American Church need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:14–27).²

Unfortunately, the idea of a “gospel culture” interrupts and compromises Jesus’ heart for the Church because it seems to require a suite of cultural losses for those at the borderlands. Living in a singular, transplanted gospel culture that imposes a laundry list of behavioral expectations that are recognizable to the metropole but are a burden to the margins involves an existential violence. It asks those of us in the borderlands to sever our limbs of self and to leave them outside the door of the meetinghouse in exchange for Mormon belonging. In this transaction, we lose the vitality of our cultural selves and we deprive the body of the Church the life that our parts can bring to it.

To illustrate: An existential violence is inflicted upon Māori, and therefore upon the body of Christ, when Māori women are told that their femininity will be recognized in their submission to male authority; when Māori women are told that their bodies should be made small and quiet, their voices soft; when Māori women are deprived of their inherited right to use that same voice to sing a man into silence should he dare to speak publicly in a way that does not comport with the wishes of the people; when the sexual power and energy of a Māori

2. Adapted from Kenneth L. Barker, ed., *The NIV Study Bible, New International Version* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2011), 1940–41.

woman's body is silenced in the wake of this oppressive insistence that her only creative power is in childbirth; when Māori women are asked to surrender their mana to white, male US church authorities, US curriculum, and systems that cause Māori people to culturally disappear; when Māori people are told that they should inhabit an identity that renders them literal descendants of Lehi and that they are in a unique covenantal relationship with God because of that lineage, and then that identity that replaced their own tribal identity is silenced away because of its impossibility; when Māori are made to feel self-conscious or worried for participating in the rites and customs of their people; when the use of the Māori language is unwelcome in church meetings; when Māori are instructed that protest is not something that good Mormons do even though those laws being protested might be the cause of their own oppression.

Too often the very cultural differences that root Māori in the ground where they develop a strong sense of self and community have been experienced by visiting authorities as out of sync with the teachings of the Church, and therefore unworthy of good Mormons. Granted, there are some practices in every culture that do not comport well with spiritual becoming and don't offer the kind of social transformation that might be recognized as the kingdom of God or Zion. We could start, however, by pointing the finger at Utah to identify the many cultural practices that do not seem to be at the heart of Christianity but somehow have found ideological, policy, and theological place. The way Mormonism is popularly practiced at the metropole and transplanted around the world places the moral/legal (i.e., attention to rules and behavior) above the relational aspects of Christianity (i.e., attention to God's relationship with us, our relationships with each other, and our relationship with the earth). Therefore, I could have my temple recommend revoked for drinking a cup of tea as a gracious gesture of hospitality in England or Taiwan, but it is unlikely that there would be any formal consequence

for me if I were to espouse white supremacist ideas in Sunday School that alienate and diminish people of color.

“Gospel culture” has become a ubiquitous term in the Church that reminds us non-Americans that we are obligated to pursue a distinctive way of life common to all members of the Church. Elder Dallin Oaks has admonished people from all cultures “to climb to the higher ground of the gospel culture, to practices and traditions that are rooted in the restored gospel of Jesus Christ.”³ That gospel culture, according to Elder Oaks, derives from the plan of salvation, the commandments of God, and the teachings of the living prophets. However, that is not where culture comes from.

Culture is a complete way of life. Culture arises over time and includes a whole raft of human behaviors—what we consider important to know, what we choose to believe, how we respond through artistic expression, what we consider to be right and wrong, our community agreements, our daily habits, how we socialize our young, the customs we preserve, the languages we speak, and the practices that grow out of being in relationship with our physical environment. As a colonized people, Māori have had significant disruptions and assaults on their cultural systems, and they have been tempted to grab on to Mormonism as a cultural prosthetic, something that offers a way of being that replaces that which has been lost. Except that one religious tradition, particularly one from the Great Basin, mountain home of the Mormon pioneers, is an inadequate substitute for indigenous people in the South Pacific.

The gospel culture, as currently understood, will not revitalize a language that holds all the secrets and wisdom of an indigenous person’s ancestral past. The gospel culture as it is currently described by LDS authorities will not arouse the resistance needed to claim and demand the material and political return of resources that were taken from a people in a slew of historical legal violations. The gospel culture will not

3. Dallin H. Oaks, “The Gospel Culture,” *Ensign*, Mar. 2012, <https://www.lds.org/ensign/2012/03/the-gospel-culture?lang=eng>.

make room for Māori to find the missing parts of the self that have been torn from them and their families by colonization. The gospel culture will not make Māori white, nor will it teach them to be proud of the color of their skin, the movement of their body, the shimmer of their thick wave of ebony hair, the arc of their generous lips, the spread of their nose, the twinkle in their chocolate almond eyes, or the thickness of their legs. Nor will it arouse pride in the mythologies that make sense of those beautiful bodies. Disney does a better job of that these days than Mormonism, despite all our “children of Lehi” talk. Moreover, the gospel culture has little capacity to be that needed bridge of enlightenment to make sense of the indigenous self. The best it can offer, as currently constituted, is a cultural prosthetic and some temporary redemption and lift for those suffering a loss because of colonization or class inequality. However, gospel culture, as presently understood, will not change the system that got people there in the first place.

Furthermore, the injunction to live a gospel culture is more often than not directed at the Other. It is commonly used as a measurement for how well converts in the Global South are measuring up to the standards of the West and is rarely used to measure the spiritual health of Utah Mormons. Therefore, it is not innocent. And having had it used in my country to paternalistically chastise us for anything we might do that does not comport with the sensibilities of a Utah authority is demeaning.

What is needed, perhaps, is that we come to some agreement as to what the plan of salvation and the teachings of the prophets and the scriptures mean. Even then, however, it is impossible to arrive at the correct meaning because all of our interpretations come out of our own cultures—as well they should.

Let me illustrate:

When LDS missionaries went about telling people that Joseph Smith was a prophet, Pākeha, white New Zealanders, said, “I’ll follow him.”

Māori said, “Of course! We have prophets too. Here’s one. Her name is Wetekia Elkington.”

When missionaries presented New Zealanders the Book of Mormon, Pākeha said, "A book of commandments to tell us what to do!"

Māori said, "This book tells us how God mandates our occupation and entitlement to our land and sovereignty."

When missionaries said, "Look to the life of Jesus as your exemplar," Pākeha said, "Jesus was kind to everyone; I should be kind too."

Māori said, "Jesus was a brown, indigenous person who was colonized like me. His politics were radical and beautiful and compassionately fierce. I should do what he did so that I'm not captured by colonial oppression like Jerusalem's religious elites."

So, whose hermeneutics wins? Whose way of interpreting the prophets, the scriptures, and the plan of salvation will dominate in this cultural war? In the past, it has been Utah's right to set the discourse, create the curriculum, and require compliance with their understanding of the gospel culture. However, I want to propose that this needs to stop. I am a frequent enough visitor to Utah and a good enough cultural analyst to know that as much as I love Utah, it is no poster child for Zion.

The problem is that the Utah Church believes that their interpretations and stories of the Church are widely shared by diverse communities, that baptism into the Church is an agreement of sorts that the way that Utah thinks about the faith is the way everyone should think about the faith, regardless of their race, ethnicity, and language. But this is simply not so. Our socialization is not incidental to how we experience and interpret faith, it is central. Those of us in the borderlands have been told repeatedly over the years to be Mormon before anything else. This places a terrible burden on us to become something we are not and can never be. The best we can do is pretend when Mormon missionaries and General Authorities come by to survey the cultural perimeters. Unfortunately, their visits have us searching for their approval, and the approval of our cultural fathers. But the confusion of trying to become something we are not sometimes injects a strange kind of orthodoxy into our communities and we see the growth of a pretense that finds us

trying to correct one another's Mormon cultural mistakes, thus pushing community well-being and spiritual thriving further out of our reach. The more we look like middle-class Utah Mormons, the more accolades, praise, and leadership we get. We notice how quickly and absolutely American expatriates in New Zealand are deferred to as having a more excellent perspective on how to do Mormonism than those locals who have put years of service into our community.

Thus, the adage "If it works in the West, let's import it to the rest" needs to be tempered with its counter adage: "If it's not working in the West, stop exporting it to the rest." There is a way in which our Americentric cultural obligations to Mormonism are making impossible the fresh wind of the spirit that the Church needs to survive with relevance and expansiveness moving forward. Gospel culture as a way of obligating the Mormon Other to sympathize with the White Western Cultural Capture of the Church is a failing idea and says more about the spiritual impoverishment of those who deploy it than it says about its possibilities. As Barbara Kingsolver so beautifully writes, "Everything you're sure is right can be wrong in another place."⁴

What do I mean by the White Western Cultural Capture of the Church?

The West has come to shape, inform, and manage Christianity into sympathy with its own interests. The Church writ large has come to measure itself in keeping with the demands of racialized, class-based, privatized capital. What does this mean?

- It means that we grapple with a church today where the face of it is multiracial and increasingly sits in the Global South or among immigrants, but the leadership continues to be white and Western.
- It means that adherence is largely oriented around individual salvation rather than group and world transformation, that faith

4. Barbara Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* (New York: Harper, 1998), 505.

has become a product on the religious marketplace, and that we transact with the Church for salvific returns.

- It means that it has become difficult to walk back racism and class inequality. The Church has proof-texted the scriptures to find evidence for skin color privilege that sees white prosperity as associated with God's blessings when it's really based on the theft of the land, labor, and well-being of the world's poorest.
- It means that an emphasis is placed on money and buildings and growth as a measure of Church vitality instead of measuring the heart of the faith through dialogue, partnership, relief of the poor, improving systems, and paying attention to relational well-being. The fact is that money can never purchase spiritual maturity; sometimes buildings are just buildings, and numbers rarely give you an accurate picture of social and personal transformation.

Notwithstanding, Utah continues to be a sending culture rather than a receiving culture. The metropole feeds us on a diet of pioneer stories, we grow up knowing the names of places of which we have no geographical conception, we know names and anecdotes, we hear their wisdom, we are required to quote them. Sometimes we get a mention at general conference—a nod to some experience by some GA as to our foreign faithfulness—but largely we are the forgotten majority as the Utah Church continues to hold itself up as the set standard.

So this leads one to ask: is there a cultural mandate? Does God have a heart for cultural diversity? Is Zion premised upon the need for homogeneity?

In an exegesis of Genesis 1:28, Nancy Pearcey writes, "The first phrase 'be fruitful and multiply,' means to develop the social world: build families, churches, schools, cities, governments, laws. The second phrase, 'subdue the earth,' means to harness the natural world: plant crops, build bridges, design computers, and compose music. This passage is

sometimes called the Cultural Mandate because it tells us that our original purpose was to create cultures, build civilizations—nothing less.”⁵

Thereafter the scriptures acknowledge the natural state of cultural diversity, calling everyone not into sameness but into the body of Christ as practitioners of faith from their own places of understanding so that everyone is enlivened and benefited by the wisdom of the other, because no one culture can see all things. A culture's prosperity or mobility or access to resources gives the people no more advantage in Christian discipleship than someone born into impoverishment. Wealth and prosperity are not signs of God's beneficence—anyone who has been to an LDS temple should know exactly who is responsible for that kind of spiritually beleaguered doctrine. Zion, our unique theological heritage, the location of our faith's greatest yearnings and aspirations, might be oneness—a unity of people—but it isn't premised on our imitation of each other. Yet this is what the idea of the gospel culture is often understood to be, and it can be rightly criticized for what it does to people outside of the dominant white Utah Mormon culture. For instance, Soong-Chan Rah points out:

In the Western, white captivity of the church, a danger exists that all people of color will strive for “honorary white people” status. We will strive to be recognized by whites, oftentimes by mirroring or mimicking white approaches to theology and white standards of ministry. In our quest to become “honorary white people,” we end up loathing the unique way that God has created us in our cultural context. This self-loathing yields a denial to the church of a fuller understanding of the gospel message from all different angles and perspectives. The challenge of the church is to empower the marginalized to recognize the gift that is the cultural mandate—that their culture is an expression of being

5. Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2004), 47.

made in the image of God (*imago dei*) and must be represented at the table of believers.⁶

How do we get to the place where everyone is invited to the table of believers, and where everyone is considered jewels in God's crown, their wisdom vibrant and useful for growing a faith that endures and enriches and a society that challenges a world of exclusion, violence, exploitation, injustice, patriarchy, colonialism, indignity, poverty, and abuse? We need in the first instance to cease imagining that one culture can be transplanted onto those people living in another culture in the hopes of achieving Zion.

Kenneth Bailey argues that "the gospel is not safe in any culture without a witness within that culture, from beyond itself." He continues, "In every culture the message of the gospel is in constant danger of being compromised by the value system that supports that culture and its goals. . . . The stranger to that culture can instinctively identify those points of surrender and call the community back to a purer and more authentic faith."⁷ We need each other's differences to undo our attachments to any cultural expression that is not useful to the building of Zion and to the peace that the world so desperately needs.

I'm going to end by providing some ideas in short order that might be useful in helping us think about how we can enter into deep and meaningful partnership with each other so as to resurrect the body of Christ from its Western cultural capture.

We can start by reforming missions. Missions are places of encounter, and we are simply not leveraging their power to create a flow of intercultural wisdom across the world. Of the old pedagogical model of mission, Frantz Fanon rightly points out: "The Church in the colonies

6. Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 139.

7. Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 165–66.

is the white people's Church, the foreigner's Church. She does not call the native to God's ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor."⁸

When I was in Utah last month, I attended a mission homecoming in Draper mirroring many homecomings I have witnessed over the years. Outside of the small field of that missionary's labor—in this case, Samoan-speaking South Auckland, New Zealand—it became clear to me once again that LDS missionaries characteristically use limited tools to minister to a diverse people. They come back home misunderstanding or oblivious to the rich cultures that have much to teach all of us. The returning missionary's heart and mind are too often empty of the deep learning that might contribute to an intercultural understanding that could serve both the missionary and the missionized and therefore enliven the body of Christ. I cannot help but think if that is all missionaries come back with, they are likely not missionaries, they are colonizers.

On that note, I would also like to address the impossibility of requiring all congregations to mimic the organization of church units in Utah. Are we even a little bit cognizant of the cultural tax we are exacting from those who must reproduce in their communities the Utah Church with its hard edges, impossible expectations, and its lack of openness to ideas beyond itself? The Church is destroying local leadership or leaving it in the hands of people who aspire to be presidents and bishops (which is often a sign of some kind of mental health failing). We at the outskirts are almost never given the opportunity to dream and envision how the gospel might best take root in our own cultures.

Secondly, there must be some acceptance of compound world-views. Cartesian dualities are a luxury for people who do not need to develop the creativity and inventiveness needed to survive. It is tyranny. Requiring one single rigid and unyielding identity is not a privilege; it is a curse for all.

8. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 42.

With that in mind, I would like to share a story of the value of cross-cultural hermeneutics. Recently an evangelical church was established in Nigeria, and the American missionaries were debating whether they would allow local leaders to administer this fresh new congregation. A cultural anthropologist was called in to help them gather the information to make that determination. The anthropologist placed the Nigerian converts in one room and the Western missionaries in another and asked them to offer an exegesis of the story of Joseph in Egypt. When the groups had finished they were asked: What is this story all about?

The Western respondents were emphatic: It is about the blessings that flow if we keep God's commandments. The Nigerians were equally emphatic: It is most definitely about the injunction God gives us to be loyal to and love our families no matter what. Now, who was right? Moreover, is that even a question we should be asking ourselves?

Two anecdotes from two different American Mormons serve to illustrate why we need to question the notion that it is possible to create a gospel culture, a distinctive way of life, common to all members of the Church:

I served on the high council in the Berlin Stake back about twenty years ago. They knowingly did things differently, sometimes as if to make a point, always with a wink and a nod. The biggest "infrac-tion" by far was that the wards did not pass all the funds upstream, but held on to an arbitrary percentage to hedge against a rainy day. When I challenged the first counselor (now a Seventy), he smiled and reminded me how Germans know a thing or two about preparing for hard times. I participated in an audit, and I know that some of the wards had put away as much as (at the time) approximately \$20,000. This also meant, however, that they funded some awesome activities. Also, the stake paid a professional organist to play at a stake conference. The stake had a very formal Gold and Green Ball, with tickets at approximately \$50 per couple. I protested. I asked how people of limited means could attend. The stake president said that stake members saved all year. Sure enough, my wife and I were under-dressed and out-classed as the Germans showed up in tuxedos and

gowns. There was a professional orchestra, catered food, and it kicked off with a traditional, formal promenade led by the presidency. Whenever there was a potluck, members who brought items submitted bills for reimbursement for whatever they brought. Weekend in-service meetings kicked off with Kaffeetrinken, or coffee—all right, it was always Kneipp or Caro brand Malzkaffee (barley/chicory coffee)—and cakes and sticky buns from the bakery. That made the meetings far more tolerable than what I was used to.

And here's the second experience:

I didn't serve outside of the US, but rather southern California. I served in extremely rich wards and the members there wore lots of costly apparel, silks, fine-twined linen, had many cars and possessions, and all manner of precious things. I never really saw that local custom squashed. Actually, it seemed like it was promoted.

Is there a gospel culture?

Certainly there is a gospel, but there are many cultures, and having the humility to see courageously and with openness exactly how the gospel shoots through those diverse cultures without measuring its expressions against Utah Mormon culture specifically and the white, Western cultural capture of the Church, without dictating the language, the clothing, the music, and the manner of worship will be Mormonism's greatest pioneer journey yet.⁹

9. The author would like to thank Steve Maina, Director of the New Zealand Church Missionary Society for inspiring these reflections.



Tyler Swain
Portrait 1, Red Pear

DECOLONIZING THE BLOSSOMING: INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S FAITH IN A COLONIZING CHURCH

Moroni Benally

My grandfather was a medicine man, a practitioner of a ceremony called the Blessingway—*Hozhoojii*. The Blessingway is described as the foundation of Navajo spirituality, the “scriptures” if you will. This ceremony informs and organizes the spiritual life and community of the Navajo people. Singers, or medicine men, perform this ceremony in times of both joy and sadness. It re-affirms one’s status as a child of “eternal goodness and beauty” and the capacity for one to become “eternal goodness and beauty” themselves. It is the organizing force of Navajo. My grandfather’s role as singer for over sixty years was one of service: singers or medicine people are not paid, and they do not expect remuneration for their spiritual work. Rather, they view what they do as a calling that ensures the fabric of Navajo society remains tightly woven around the broad notions of family, which also means happiness.

My grandfather subsequently left this practice and joined the Church at the age of 84. He described the doctrine of the Church as pure as the dew in the morning, and he noted that the ceremony he performed for decades felt incomplete once he heard the gospel. The Church doctrine completed the Blessingway ceremony for my grandfather. At the age of 87, he and my grandmother were sealed in the Mesa Arizona Temple. My father took him through the temple. As

my grandfather was washed, blessed, and anointed, he wept and was overcome with emotion.

My father accompanied him, translating the temple ceremony into Navajo. My grandfather later described his experience with the temple: “for years, our people have performed a similar ceremony. We would wash and anoint the people on their loins, their eyes, their lips, their hands, and we would utter a similar prayer.” He saw the temple ceremony as the pure ceremony lost by our people. His ability to accept and adopt new truth enabled him to negotiate his spirituality and his place in the Church.

There are stories from other Indigenous members of the Church who have described the ritual, doctrine, and practices of the Church as completing their Indigenous spiritual framework. They, like my grandfather, found ways to synthetically honor both without compromising the truth they found in the Church.

My family, like my grandfather, respectfully negotiated the doctrines of the Church with their Navajo practices, always viewing the Church structure and organization within the broader context of colonization. Missionaries did not convert my grandfather, White people did not convert him. Rather, he engaged my father (his son) in conversation (over fifteen years) about his new religion.

The local and regional Church leadership was ecstatic that a medicine man had joined the Church and they immediately begin to use it as an example of the blossoming of the Lamanites prophesized in the scriptures (e.g., D&C 49:24). My grandfather’s story was quickly framed as a “pioneer” story, the implication being that my Navajo family had Mormon pioneer ancestry.

This family story raises several questions: to what extent has a Euro-American mythology of Indigenous emergence and spirituality penetrated and replaced the Indigenous mythos? What technologies are

employed to operationalize the replacement? And why do Indigenous people remain?

In responding to these questions, we must engage the following: 1) a theory of settler colonialism; 2) the Church as a settler colonial apparatus; and, 3) Indigenous faith as an act of resistance.

Settler Colonialism

The central premise of the Book of Mormon is—according to Church leadership, curriculum, and the book itself—to “convince the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the eternal God.” However, it also becomes a tool of erasure for Indigenous people’s rightful claim to land, politics, economies, and power.

These dual functions often work together, the second regularly stemming from the first. This erasure and replacement is one facet of settler colonialism.

Settler colonialism is about elimination. The premise of settler colonialism, according to Patrick Wolfe, is the elimination of the native from their land. Land is life, he argues. “The logic of elimination not only refers to the summary liquidation of Indigenous people, though it includes that. . . . [S]ettler colonialism has both negative and positive dimensions. Negatively, it strives for the dissolution of native societies. Positively, it erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base.” Wolfe argues that “settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event.”¹ The implications of this framing are vast.

Thus, the struggles of native peoples in the United States—and in the Church—becomes a struggle against elimination, against their erasure. The implicit consequences of this struggle are significant, particularly in the context of the Mormon expansion westward and Mormon

1. Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 388.

settlement in lands they did not own. Indigenous scholars have read Mormonism as nothing more than a uniquely American structure of native elimination. I will push back on this notion in a bit.

The theory of settler colonialism describes a structure of invasion and replacement. The Book of Mormon functions as both a tool of invasion and replacement, but also, strangely, as an instrument of resistance against the Church itself.

If the Book of Mormon functions as a tool of epistemic and ontological invasion and replacement, can one be Indigenous and still believe? This is an important question to reflect on, as it pushes back against the biopolitics operational within Indigenous communities. Tejaswini Niranjana describes “one of the classic moves of colonial discourse . . . [which] is to present the colonial subject as unchanging and immutable.”² Citing this tendency, Brendan Hokowhitu argues that “many Indigenous scholars have themselves canonised [sic.] tradition in their re-search. Such a focus is debilitating when predicated upon the search for a nonexistent authentic precolonial past.”³

This tension is rather complicated. The Book of Mormon serves to both erase and renounce the “unchanging and immutable” Indigenous tradition of the non-Mormon colonial discourse, while seeking to build up an “authentic” precolonial past of Indigenous people, which, by function, erases the history of the people.

This mechanism remains complicated. It suggests there is no space of negotiation for the Indigenous person to adopt, assimilate, and invite different belief systems into already-existing belief structures. If decolonization is about de-centering power out of white spaces and re-centering it into Indigenous spaces, then the capacity

2. Tejaswini Niranjana, *Siting Translation: History, Post-Structuralism, and the Colonial Context* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1992), 37.

3. Brendan Hokowhitu, “Indigenous Existentialism and the Body,” *Cultural Studies Review* 15, no. 2 (2009): 103.

of Indigenous “conversion” becomes an act of resistance against the structure of invasion.

Settler Colonial Apparatus

The Church continues to assert itself as a colonizing institution. In 2007, Elder Jeffery R. Holland spoke to a gathering of Navajo members stressing to them they are “Latter-day Saint first, and Navajo second.” Many Navajos at the time reacted with some degree of offense and hostility. After centuries of overt colonization, theft of land, paternalistic government and Church policies, many felt a sense of obviation at this call to a Mormon logic of success that cannot be separated from a politics of whiteness. Being a Latter-day Saint meant being “white” rather than Mormon, and not something that speaks to the spiritual center of Navajo being.

The biopower of the Church in structuring identity under the premise of agency furthers the colonial reach of not only the Church, but of the white supremacy within the US itself. Indigenous Mormon communities are replete with stories of local Church leaders acting with impunity in order to ensure the social structure of the Church (a structure built and maintained through a politics of whiteness) remains firmly locked within a Latter-day Saint logic of success. Any deviation, through the use of Indigenous spirituality to enhance their views of a gospel doctrine, is repudiated.

Resistance

Yet, the paradox at play here is that the attempt to control and structure the identity of faithful members of the Church by making them abide by a logic of Latter-day Saint whiteness denies their acting in consonance with the core purpose of the Book of Mormon. It is at this moment that the Book of Mormon becomes both an agent of colonialism and a tool of resistance. Many, like my grandfather, negotiated membership into

the LDS Church on their terms, destabilizing the power of conversion politics while retaining tenets of faith not consistent with the logics of Latter-day Saint success. Rather, his faith rested on what he considered as epistemic and ontological commensurability. It was not governed by the promises of an afterlife, or the inability of Mormon faith to adequately grasp the meaning of family, especially in light of the meaning of sealings. His faith was not governed by historical inconsistencies, by debates on the Trinity, the godhead, or by notions of grace and works. Rather, in the LDS Church, his faith thrived due to what it could complete and add to what he already believed and practiced as a Navajo spiritual leader. What mattered to him was the way the Book of Mormon furthered and enhanced his understanding of what it meant for him to be Indigenous, even if his belief in being an Israelite was not complete. In this model, then, his faith was both loyal and an act of resistance.

Several modes of resistance emerged from Indigenous communities. Despite the ways in which the Church promoted a mythology designed to replace their own, Indigenous peoples resisted in significant, but marginal, ways. Passive non-compliance is a key mode of resistance and simultaneously an act of faith. Its main focus concerns re-centering power. The biopolitical power of the Church attempts to structure and dictate what is and is not culturally appropriate. For example, Church leaders swiftly reprimand Indigenous people for attending native ceremonies, yet participating in these ceremonies expands their understanding of the central core doctrines of eternal connectedness or family. They attend these native ceremonies as a response to the Church's obsession with individuality and its limited ability to understand the meaning of family, especially within the sealing context. These ceremonies provide a core meaning that is missing from the lexicon of the Church. The Church, in many instances, is constructed upon premises that privilege upholding whiteness, which is itself ultimately centered on notions of individualism. Thus, Indigenous people continue to participate in their own ceremonies because these ceremonies expand the meaning of

Church doctrine and reify the core purposes of the Book of Mormon. This mode of passive non-compliant resistance is premised on faith itself.

The Blossoming

The blossoming is controlled and strictly guarded by Church leadership and the logic of Latter-Day Saint whiteness undergirding its approach to the faith. The logic of the blossoming must be internally consistent with the principles of erasing Indigenous people from stolen land, and must uphold deflection of complicity in that theft. Therefore, the blossoming must be consistent with a logic of Latter-day Saint whiteness. It must be controlled, policed, and intelligible only by the power centers of Mormonism.

I would argue, then, that faith as resistance is about obviating this Latter-day Saint logic and reclaiming ownership of the narrative around the “Children of Father Lehi” and by extension, Indigenous people defining for themselves the criteria that constitute the blossoming. In many Indigenous circles, the blossoming has been expressed as a political, economic, and sociological ideal—it is not limited simply to the spiritual. This approach reflects the Indigenous worldview: an Indigenous ontology sees no distinction between the spiritual, the political, or the economic. They are related. Thus, by simply being attentive to their own moral framework and folding Mormonism into it, these Indigenous people pose a threat to the structures of Mormonism.

Indigenous people and their interactions with and relationships to Mormonism are obviously complex and complicated. What I have shared here does not to dismiss or diminish the views of those who are not part of the Church but whose lives have been disrupted in real and significant ways due to the colonizing influence of the Church. At the same time, I find it important to emphasize that there are various ways of resisting the inherent logic of settler colonialism that has historically been part of the interpretation and doctrine derived from the Book

of Mormon. The Church would benefit from a more nuanced understanding of the ways faith emerges and enacts conversion as a gesture of complement and completion rather than rejection. It must come to terms with the fact that faith itself becomes an act of resistance to the cultural whiteness underlying the social and political structures of the Church. For Indigenous members, faith does not imbue the Church with meaning. Rather, faith synthesizes meaning. Put another way, this Indigenous faith *blossoms*.

MORMON POETRY, 2012 TO THE PRESENT

Bert Fuller

*any real religion is a big slow poem
while a poem is a small fast religion*
—Les Murray

Over the last few decades, universities have become the home of contemporary poetry in the United States, where nearly every major poet is also an academic. Poets, like other professors, teach classes, publish in tiered journals, sit on committees, undergo tenure review, secure grants, win prizes, attend conferences, and oversee graduate students. The result is that poetry, whatever else may be said of it, is a recognized industry of intellectual activity within university culture. It constitutes an academic discourse not unlike history or sociology. Within this broader context, it is not surprising that Mormon poetry, too, is a largely academic enterprise. In the past few years, since the publication of *Fire in the Pasture: Twenty-First-Century Mormon Poets* (Peculiar Pages, 2011), there has been an immodest outpouring of Mormon verse. These publications deserve the attention of those invested in the full expression of Mormon intellectual culture, and the following essay seeks to provide a synoptic view of this vast material along with brief critical commentary. Hundreds of poets have published work relevant to this

review, and I have therefore limited the scope to only those exhibiting the greatest aesthetic and cognitive impact.¹

First, Kimberly Johnson. Her third poetry collection to date, *Uncommon Prayer*, is unlike its predecessors, *Leviathan with a Hook* or *A Metaphorical God*, in that it displays a clear overall design. Each of *Uncommon Prayer*'s poems is a self-contained supplication, and there are fifty poems in all (think Pentecost, or Jubilee). These appear across three sections: twelve in *Book of Hours*, twelve in *Uncommon Prayers*, and twenty-six in *Siege Psalter*. The book opens at the start of a new day, closes near midnight on the third day, and begins and ends with the votive slogan "somewhere on the other side"—words which, thanks to their rhetorical force as extended diacope, hover at the edge of each poem individually. The sections, too, have their own symmetries. Like the *Cathemerinon* of Prudentius, *Book of Hours* presents a breviary of the Divine Office with its poems formatted into verse paragraphs, not to mention the punning tulips present at morning prayer and benediction. *Uncommon Prayers* also begins during the day and ends at night but with its orations uttered in couplets. Lastly, *Siege Psalter* is an alphabet poem akin to Jeremiah's Lamentations or the sacred ramblings of Kit Smart. It kicks off with George Herbert's characterization of prayer as "Engine

1. For various reasons, I was unable to include discussions of the following important works: Claire Åkebrand's *What Was Left of the Stars*, Matthew James Babcock's *Strange Terrain*, Lisa Bickmore's *Ephemerist*, Timothy Liu's *Kingdom Come: A Fantasia*, Rachel Hunt Steenblik's *Mother's Milk*, Jeffrey Tucker's *Kill February*, and the lyrics by R. John Williams (cf. interview by Sage Turk, *Infants on Thrones*, podcast audio, September 2, 2016, <http://infantsonthrones.com/the-new-atheists-guide-to-not-being-a-total-asshole-episode-4-music/>, 43:29–57:21). Additionally, there are the poets included in Joanna Brooks, Rachel Hunt Steenblik, and Hannah Wheelwright, eds., *Mormon Feminism: Essential Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016): Elouise Bell, Joanna Brooks, Lisa Bolin Hawkins, Susan Elizabeth Howe, Violet Tew Kimball, Margaret Rampton Munk, Carol Lynn Pearson, Claire Whitaker Peterson, Linda Sillitoe, and Lorie Winder Stromberg.

against th' Almighty," then proceeds to barrage Alpha-and-Omega with each letter of the NATO phonetic alphabet—Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, etc. From start to finish Johnson never lets up. I've read the poems in *Uncommon Prayer* some twenty times, and it continually articulates "the grand historic sweep of hurt" (40). It exposes with regularity pains I did not know were mine while proffering the occasional salve. Its Latinate diction, its biblical and poetic fluency, its botanical, codicological, and liturgical terminologies, its mundane materiality, and its temporal sensitivity to clock and sky and the flipping pages of a book combine to create a well-crafted triptych of reverent irreverence that answers in verse the rising tide of postsecularism.

There is also a translation by Johnson of Hesiod, Homer's ancient competitor. As to why Hesiod, I would pose the following speculations. First, Johnson rightly points out that Hesiod stands at the head of Western lyricism, a perennial focus of her work. Hesiod likewise initiates the georgic tradition, which Johnson favors and which her other translation project, Virgil, imitated preparatory to epic. Additionally, Hesiod writes of *eris*, or strife, a technical concept suffusing Johnson's Miltonic Mormonism—or rather her Mormonic Miltonism. Most significant, however, is the fact that, astonishingly, Johnson is the first poet of note to compose full versions of both *Theogony* and *Works and Days* since Hesiod himself. Partial translations by George Chapman, Thomas Hooke, and Giacomo Leopardi command their own interest. But Johnson is the only one-stop Hesiod shop outside the realms of historicist philology, i.e. translations by classical scholars. Because she treats "the line as a discrete poetic object" (p. x), as something that cannot be reduced, sublimated, or allegorized, Johnson stretches Greek usage beyond the semantic limits set by lexicographers. Whatever else, Johnson's Hesiod is certainly the most readable English version available, notwithstanding cavils I have with transliteration irregularities and idiosyncratic alliteration patterns.

Next is Kristen Eliason, a Kimberly Johnson protégé and author of *Picture Dictionary*. The book, formatted as a bilingual dictionary, chronicles Eliason's experiences teaching English in 2006 in Kan'onji, Kagawa, as well as her bewildering grief following the death of her partner, Trent Johnson (1982–2005), who drowned on Memorial Day at Gunlock Reservoir. A complex book, *Picture Dictionary* journeys throughout the Mormon Corridor and southern Japan, puts into action scores of characters, narrates events asynchronously, and incorporates elements from several genres: travel memoir, school story, pastoral elegy à la *Lycidas*, confession, dream vision, requiem à la *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, pilgrim allegory, abecedary, and anatomy à la Burton. Adding to these complexities, the book, like any useful dictionary, contains as many unfamiliar words as familiar ones. For instance, the term *hanami* was new to me, and it is key to unlocking the general pattern. It refers to a Japanese spring celebration, where partygoers appreciate nature's transient beauty by watching cherry blossoms drop. These flowers—"cascading toward the base of the falls"—come to represent the dying youth, and a page devoted to *hanami* appears after each section. The sections, of which there are ten, are organized according to the katakana syllabary, and each section is made up of entries that look like this:

SHINJU, n.

Fig. 87: a rope, a rock, a body of water.

Double suicide. He asks her *did he jump* and it has to be translated like this: big eyes, quiet asking. The missionaries translate for him, then you, *no, he fell* and then as a translator's note, the tall one adds, *yeah, because who would do that if they had a girl as pretty as you are?* To this she has no response, other than *no, no, he would never jump*. She would have jumped.

All entries include a Japanese headword, the part of speech, a numbered figure printed in red, and at least one translation that is usually accompanied by some cinematic dialogue and narration. In this entry, Eliason adapts a convention of Japanese puppet-theater in light of actual events. She uses italics for speech, refers to herself in the second and third persons, leaves the *he* unidentified, and keeps the elders nameless. In other entries, Eliason employs quotation marks, the first person, personal names, translator's notes, and myriad fictional sources. Fortunately, such stylistic variation most often facilitates poetic intent; however, typos throughout the book demonstrate that it would have benefited from a tighter copyedit, since increased typographic consistency. Rather, the issue lies with general formatting procedures, since increased typographic consistency would have improved the mimesis of presenting a "real" dictionary. Nevertheless, *Picture Dictionary* is a unique bricolage of loss and recognition, pleading and blasphemies, petty lusts, selflessness, irony, sincerity, and the rare sentimental indulgence. With its images of sliding doors and blood-red oranges, it stands as an efficacious "study in the fragmentation of recorded memory as language relative to the demands of grief on cognitive process" (s.v. *chikugoyaku*).

Third on the list is John Talbot, Mormonism's greatest metrist and wit. Deliciously self-aware without being self-conscious, Talbot recognizes that his very virtues could account for the unpopularity of his first book:

let's just say
 Nobody took it for the hit parade.
 I kid you not, I do not own one copy.
 It took me months to give them all away. (11)

These lines contain no confession of regret as his next move is to quote a poem of his own then cleverly provide, in meter, a metrical analysis of it. Here we find a poet plying his trade, playful and confident, even

when the market is bad. But what Talbot may not know is that his second book, *Rough Translation*, coincidentally addresses what has of late become a hot topic in Mormon studies, at least since photographs of the brown seer stone were released. Reading this book, one wonders at times if what Talbot does with Horace is anything like what Smith did to Genesis, but I leave such questions to those more invested in the topic than I myself am. What interests me is fiction, and in that realm Talbot excels.

The prologue, “The King’s Tattoo,” recounts in twenty pages of blank verse, first, Talbot’s golden days before his “rough translation” from Sudbury, Massachusetts, to the Intermountain West, and then second, a personal visitation by the ghost of King Philip, aka Metacomet (1639–76), one night after the poet’s wife (Sandy) and son (James) had gone to sleep. Metacomet does not speak but reveals a full-body tattoo depicting an imagined history of Sudbury’s land and people, which includes Talbot (24) and his colonial forebears (26). The tattoo recalls the blood and bucolics of Aeneas’s and Achilles’s shields, which are portrayed on the front cover, but disappears once the narrator suspects the Spirit of plagiarism (29). The prologue then ends with a purposefully half-assed invocation of the muse, and this statement of subject matter:

That I would know
The paradox of other people’s words
Becoming wholly mine through love’s translation. (30)

A sturdy chunk of verse, “The King’s Tattoo” sets up characters, cadences, and geography that appear in the poems that follow. Genuinely funny and heroic, it, along with the collection’s forty-plus other pieces, represents the finest example of family history in Mormon letters of which I am aware. I cite from “After the Latin (14)” for supporting evidence:

“Married a poet, lot of good it did me”—
That’s how you joke, half-joking, with your friends

...

See him stoop—
Your poet—over his OED, indifferent
To sunset and the candles and the
Elegant way that your hair is braided!

This is a crime. It may cost him his soul.
May cost him you. And yet would you believe
That all those books he so adores, his
Cloying obsession with sound and syntax,

Rotate, along with him, in sympathetic
Traction around your star? (89)

Rounding out the discussion of poetry patronized at Brigham Young University, we turn to *Genius Loci* by Lance Larsen and *Salt* by Susan Elizabeth Howe. My comments here will be brief, serving mostly to highlight representative passages.²

Genius Loci is Larsen’s fourth collection and is, like its predecessors, eminently readable. To those for whom poetry is all medieval forest, Larsen offers a way out—or in, depending on your intent. He is a master not only of the accessible style at the level of line and stanza but a master as well of flowing one poem into the next, often accomplished through volta-suppression. An hour will pass before realizing you just sauntered through fifteen odes despite knowing little of Pindar or Keats. And, vitally, Larsen is a poet of substance and sustains multiple readings over time, unlike much work by other important plain speakers such as Mary Oliver or Rupi Kaur. Part of his strategy is to eschew what he calls “that

2. For a fuller review see Tyler Chadwick, “Susan Elizabeth Howe, *Salt*; Lance Larsen, *Genius Loci*,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (2016): 195–202.

stink of Latin” (55), which would include a certain Roman allusiveness more common in someone like Talbot. *Genius Loci* nonetheless reaches into the classical past through honoring its ever-present household gods. These numinous guardians often manifest as animal spirits, whether beast, fish, creeping thing, or fowls of the air:

I slip outside into a corridor of clarity and breeze—
that pinking time when owls home to barns, when bats
fold their genius into gloves of sleep and cranes
whoop in the morning like freckled boys on stilts. (22)

Or they intrude in the form of natural phenomena, such as shadows, clouds, or sunlight falling past trees:

as if a flock of angels had chewed
summer into lace. (54)

The general ethos of *Genius Loci* is nature redeemed, though not in the traditional sense. Death still lacks its sting (see e.g. “Between the Heaves of Storm”), but Death, in Larsen’s world, shall not die. In lieu of Isaiah’s lions and lambs, we read of the midnight cricket thrown to “some wilder throat already singing” (53), or of a severed deer head (12), or a gutted fish “sliced from anus to sunset” (4). Such violence is innocent but du jour, intelligent yet routine. It embodies—by implication only, to be sure—Mormon notions of “one eternal round” and “doing that which has been done on other worlds.” At stake here is not doctrinal content but imaginative limits.³ Within Mormon cosmology, it is not possible to conceive of an end to birth or dying, so nature redeemed must reify

3. Frederick Turner outlines such imaginative limits in the afterword to his book, *Paradise* (Cincinnati: David Robert Books, 2004). He claims that the contemporary world admits four dominant paradigms of paradise, and that Mormonism is the most articulate expression of the one traceable to William Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Among LDS poets, Lance Larsen is this paradigm’s purest example.

death, not annihilate it. Despite death's permanent recurrence, however, and the uncertainty such a concept introduces to the Western religious imagination, Larsen maintains a profound trust towards the universe. Focusing intensely on death, *Genius Loci* nevertheless promotes fully and persuasively a healthy and happy engagement with life. I cannot recommend it enough.

Howe, editor of the delightful anthology *Discoveries*, uses the poems in *Salt* as preservatives and seasoning. In "Another Parable of the Cave," she revitalizes the legend of Timpanogos, first put to verse by Edward Tuttle. In "Desecration" she conjures with dazzling mythopoeia the ancient gods of Utah's Carbon County, formerly expelled by

[the] hysterical priest
of a weak god who required
the extermination of history
lest his lack of power be exposed. (28)

The fulcrum poem, "The Law of Salt," puts the mineral at the heart of Elohim's labor:

From God's body sweat flowed
into the seas during the six days
He worked on the world.
This was the beginning of salt. (31)

"Family Trees" exemplifies Mormonism's mother cult and what Christopher Lasch identifies in *World of Nations* as its ancestor worship. "Trying on Charlotte Brontë's Dress" is a nice counterpoint to "Taking Off Emily Dickinson's Clothes" by Billy Collins, and the Catherine Dickens monologue is brilliant womanly rebuke. "Blessing the Baby" is sure to be an instant Mormon classic. And, finally, should any influencer find herself reading this essay by accident, "My True Country" deserves to be carved in stone across Howe's home state.

Next are four books by high school teacher and Gulf War vet Justin Evans. First, *Hobble Creek Almanac* is a slim biography-in-verse of the poet's hometown. Evans, like Howe or the late John Sterling Harris, cultivates a supple local style, complemented in this book by lines from the unpublished poems of Achilles Blanchard, Springville's forgotten bard. The book is an effective homage, and it exemplifies the kind of memorializing art that more towns should incentivize citizens to create. Second, *Lake of Fire* depicts the landscapes of Evans's current home in the Great Basin deserts of Nevada. Unlike *Hobble Creek Almanac*, which narrates characters and events, *Lake of Fire* holds up a mirror to the natural environment and the four seasons. Like *Hobble Creek Almanac*, however, the poems in *Lake of Fire* are modest, rustic things. Third, *Sailing This Nameless Ship* leaves town and valley to navigate oceans of the self. With one eye to Homer and the other on Joseph Campbell, this epyllion follows heroic convention by probing irreducible tensions between the personal and political. As the narrator seeks mythic points of origin throughout the book, he questions whether

It might be time to reconsider
this modern age when everything
is possible, re-think our desire
to rebuild everything once lost. (38)

Here Evans erases the lust for utopias—a radical move within the context of restorationism. And the politics continue in Evans's latest book, *All the Brilliant Ideas I've Ever Had*. Alongside more formally oriented poems addressing poetics, aesthetics, mimesis, and defamiliarization, Evans includes several pieces on ideology and idealism. We read for instance what the poet-soldier remembers about Desert Storm (14), in lines where disgust, instinct, and fantasy alchemize to rewrite assumptions about patriotism and autoeroticism, recalling Tony Harrison's "A Cold Coming."

The next poet adheres to what has been referred to as Ancient Mormonism, a now unpopular gnostic form of the religion.⁴ Colin B. Douglas, a Native-American convert, veteran, journalist, and retired Church curriculum editor, also with three books: *First Light, First Water*; *Glyphs*; and *Division by Zero*. Of these, *First Light, First Water* is the most satisfying read. It uses simple diction—always “yellow,” never “chartreuse,” “tawny,” or “saffron”—to progress through three stages, with the whole design set between a preface and an epilogue. Written in the idiom of David and Solomon, stage one presents semi-chiastic hymns that glorify Creation, the Creator, and heterosexual love. Stage two moves inward toward contemplation, marked by increased repetition. And stage three changes form altogether, from the short lyrics of the first two parts to oneiric prose poems. Thus, the book follows a katabatic movement from the superconscious, through the self-conscious, to the subconscious mind. The central images for these stages are, respectively, the deer, the mirror, and the corridor, each present at the book’s anti-climax, “There Were Several Reasons Why This Wouldn’t Work.” *First Light, First Water* concludes in a Borgesian word-labyrinth, where Douglas continues to reside throughout *Glyphs* and *Division by Zero*. *Glyphs* uses the same preface and epilogue as its predecessor, presenting in total ninety-five compositions: the thirty-nine from *First Light, First Water* in about the same order with some revisions, plus fifty-six new pieces. The new material fleshes out the contours of Douglas’s neo-romantic surrealism, with an uptick in Amerindian imagery (e.g. “Outside the Longhouse”) and eroticism (e.g. “More Wedding Songs”). Occasionally something truly bizarre stands out, like the blood, ivy, and three mallet raps from “A Tale of Detection.” But overall, the poems do not assemble into an imaginative

4. See <https://themormonworker.wordpress.com/2012/09/02/the-new-mormonism/>. See also Paul Toscano, *Mormonism in Crisis: A Critique and A Defense* (self-published, 2017).

edifice. Rather, they represent the unconstructed dream space of raw, infinite subconscious, to paraphrase Christopher Nolan. *Division by Zero*, as its title would suggest (37), goes even further in this direction. Except now, Douglas enters full-blown Dada:

Trees, when they make love,
Conjugate the orbit of the square root of a thigh. (40)

A farrago of seer stones and female breasts, the book remains a masculinist *selva oscura* (but see p. 76 for an instance of queer subversion). It is a collection where the greatest illumination comes from poems with titles like “The Sewing Machine Needle of Truth Floats Free.” And yet, certain combinations stick, such as “the mirror-walled labyrinth called history” (43) and “God cares nothing for precedent” (83).

Timothy Liu, a Chinese-American professor of English whose most recent books include *Don't Go Back to Sleep* and *Kingdom Come: A Fantasia*, likewise communicates through nightmares and dreams. *Don't Go Back to Sleep* opens with the phantasmagoric Nanking Massacre (following which his parents fled China for California, where he was born and converted). Facts concerning the massacre are controversial, but the poet writes,

Photos exist:
... some were forced to dig ditches, forced again
to lie down in them while the next group shoveled dirt
on top of them, muffling their screams,
others buried up to their necks
only to be beheaded, bayoneted, flattened by the treads of a tank. (4)

He presents these lurid details not to shock the reader with horrors that are *out there* or *back then*. His primary aim is instead to awaken us, as the title indicates, to a more complete sense of possible selves already *in here* and *at hand*. Even the Chinese

found themselves
 beyond what they thought they were
 capable of . . .
 impaled [heads] on long bamboo poles. (16)

Neither are Americans exculpated, for

what will American textbooks say about Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo,
 water boarding and extraordinary rendition fifty years from now? (3)

Liu recognizes that such large-scale disasters occur only through the combined actions of wounded individuals. So it is with private vulnerabilities that he is most preoccupied throughout the rest of the book. For instance, what principle of intimacy was violated when a close friend cut him off after learning he was gay, claiming that everything they had experienced together was a lie (34–35)? Or how is it that Mormons, who believe mortality is for acquiring bodily experience, often lead conservative and risk-averse lives? “Either eat the thing,” Liu agitates,

or don’t. Either unhinge
 your jaw and take in
 this world or leave it
 alone. (73)

These lines recall the Eden story, specifically what Eve says in Moses 5:11–12: “Were it not for our transgression . . .” The salvation of transgression is what Liu sings. Indeed, transgression is also a key theme in the sex-opera apocalypse *Kingdom Come*, but that staggering book requires separate consideration.

Another Chinese American is Neil Aitken, the Canadian-born computer programmer, translator of poets Ming Di (*River Merchant’s Wife*) and Zang Di (*The Book of Cranes*), and author of *Leviathan* and *Babbage’s Dream*. It is the last of these that concerns us, since it includes all the poems of its predecessor plus thirty additional compositions. Four kinds of poem populate the collection, two categorizable under “Babbage”

and two under “Dream.” The Babbage poems either recount times from the life of English polymath and inventor of the first computer, Charles Babbage (1791–1871), or expand key terms of computational discourse such as *array*, *float*, *short*, *variable*, *list*, etc. The Dream poems appear as dramatic monologues or faux-code. (They are “dreams” because they exist outside the historic bounds of Babbage’s waking life, while imaginatively fulfilling or responding to his vision of digital programming.) The monologues represent soliloquies by AI machines, which should excite the transhumanist crowd: Frankenstein’s monster, Alpha 60 from *Alphaville*, HAL 9000 from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, chess-players like Deep Blue or the false Mechanical Turk, and Babbage’s own “Leviathan.” The code poems (“Binary,” “Recursion,” “Comment,” “Void,” and “Conditional”) are the collection’s most creative, translating between poetic English and C++ or binary:

0000 :Absence stretched to extremity, nothingness in all quarters

0001 :At the far stretches of the void, a glimmer.

...

1100 :Two trees at the edge of a wide plain

1101 :From here, we watch someone crossing over the fields. (35)

Lisa Bickmore, who won the €10,000 Ballymaloe Poetry Prize for her poem “Eidolon” and the Antivenom award for her book *flicker*, is a professor at Salt Lake Community College. The book breaks into four untitled sections, plus a verse postscript, which do not exhibit a progression in theme or imagery. Rather, each poem represents its own spark in the night sky; hence, the cover displaying Jim Campbell’s “Scattered Light.” So, while constellations could be drawn between the pages, there is a stubborn lack of architecture indicative of a totalizing design. Contra sublime theophany, Bickmore prefers to kindle the reader’s vision using stopped yet fleeting moments. In every poem, she manages to stretch a second into something permanent, whether it is with the verb-less garden in “Concord” or the erotic nightmares

“Tell Me Why” and “The Blade.” To help with this effect, she uses sentences that are long or incomplete, ends on a colon or dash, privileges non-finite verb forms, and narrates impossible simultaneity of action. Bickmore, who has respectfully referred to Joseph Smith as a sower of chaos (note the pun), does not shy from naked allusions to Mormonism. These include bloodless angels without wings, temple clothing, something older than memory, late night Saturday shopping, and this candid admission:

Because it's Sunday, I'm thinking about
how happiness can be wrung from suffering. (31)

These allusions stretch common usage, expanding familiar orbits of the Mormon imaginary. They also generate context for other, less clearly “Mormon” lines to resonate within the discourse. “Envoi,” for example, ends with “tastes of coffee, semen, ash.” Mormons experience these substances differently than most, given taboos in the culture against hot drinks, fellatio, and cremation. So although there is nothing explicitly religious about the poem, it appears in a context which would allow for specifically Mormon contemplation of death and the fall.

The most important collection to explore the early church is *Glossolalia* by non-Mormon Canadian academic Marita Dachsel. Inspired by Todd Compton's magisterial *In Sacred Loneliness*, Dachsel weaves occasionally altered historical statements in italics with original verse in roman type to showcase the individual voices of Smith's plural wives. These *Spoon River*-esque monologues appear in four sections, each of which includes narrative lyrics, a passage from the revelation on plural marriage, and a reflection by Emma. This fearful symmetry would suggest an overwhelming design, but closer inspection abolishes any straightforward pattern—a fitting allegory perhaps for the impetus and aims of Nauvoo polygamy. The wives do not proceed chronologically, as in Compton, nor is their arrangement either fixed

or arbitrary. It matters that Emma is first and Eliza last, displacing the Fannys as usual bookends, but the exact placement of Flora, Rhoda, and Delcena seems less vital. This middle way between rigid and disordered embodies well the organic dynamism of Smith's romantic vision, likely shared by these women. After all, the protagonist of *Glossolalia* is not any one person but the relationality of polygamy itself. Rather than serving historical accuracy, each successive monologue uses a varied poetic form to throw the character of plural marriage into further relief. For a panoply of attitudes ranging from pragmatic (Elizabeth Durfee), to wrenching (Patty Sessions), to simple (Hannah Ells), to regal (Eliza Snow), *Glossolalia* is an effective distillation of early Mormon plural marriage.

Three other books focus on Joseph Smith Mormonism. Daymon Smith, foremost scholar of LDS correlation and author of the essential *Book of Mammon*, wrote *City of Saints: An Opera in Five Acts*. Around six thousand lines of jagged meter, *City of Saints* could create a nice stage spectacle if an abridged version were possible. The aforementioned Colin Douglas arranged into verse *Six Poems by Joseph Smith*, supplemented with commentary. These discussions will help Sunday school teachers and LDS historians better appreciate D&C poetics. Lastly, Hal Robert Boyd and Susan Easton Black edited *Psalms of Nauvoo: Early Mormon Poetry*, a handsomely published volume tracking in verse the move from Boggs in Missouri to bogs in Illinois. *Psalms of Nauvoo* reminds today's students of Mormonism that without exception pre-Utah periodicals included poetry, including the *Nauvoo Expositor*, which Boyd and Black gloss over. However, all three of these books err in their aesthetic appraisals by misunderstanding what Harold Bloom meant when he called early Mormonism *materia poetica* (see *Psalms of Nauvoo*, xxvii). To correct this misunderstanding would require a separate essay, so for now I only acknowledge the problem with the aim of addressing it more completely in a future publication.

So far, I have summarized and commented briefly upon what I consider to be the most significant contributions to Mormon poetry over the last few years, offering where possible modicums of literary, cultural, and academic context. Several items remain that deserve mention, and these must be surveyed quicker than I would otherwise like. First, there are the books. Western Michigan University awarded its New Issues Poetry Prize to Weber State professor Laura Stott's *In the Museum of Coming and Going*. Stott manages to infuse her writing with a mixture of moonlight and mist, since the idiom is ethereal but the imagery concrete—a difficult effect to produce. The University of Wisconsin gave Christina Stoddard the Brittingham prize for *Hive*, whose title poem combines honeybees, priesthood blessings, temple baptisms, singing, and being buried alive. Dave Nielsen's *Unfinished Figures* may be the first award-winning book to feature the word “freaking,” and biologist Steven Peck's *Incorrect Astronomy* follows the long tradition of poetry perpetuating bad science, including steampunk and scrying. *Forsythia* by Mark D. Bennion eulogizes the death of his baby brother Brian (1975–78) while dispatching the titular resurrection flower as a means of celebrating his continued existence beyond the veil. Ashely Mae Hoiland's *One Hundred Birds Taught Me to Fly: The Art of Seeking God* successfully narrates Wordsworthian spots of time (cf. *The Prelude* 12.208–18), responding to Mormonism's current wounds as it undergoes profound revision at the level of metaphor and myth. Finally, James Goldberg, author of the near-perfect *Five Books of Jesus*, electronically released *Let Me Drown with Moses*, which presents four dozen compositions of sobriety and delight that ought to be recalled during the hymnal's next overhaul (see esp. “Prayer on the Red Sea Shore”).

Next, there are four chapbooks, all of which happen to emphasize travel. First, *Points of Reference* by Matthew James Babcock is from a technical standpoint the most accomplished. Consider for instance the couplets of “Running in Madison County”:

“Free Kittens” on a chipboard sign spray paints hope in black.
Roadside ruts unearth a rusted hubcap zodiac.

...

Badgerweed buffs hillsides with a floss of sulfur glare.
Yellow gusts of tanagers trade blades of dusty air. (15)

Or the half-ironic notes of gratitude in “Thanks, Henry Ford”:

[Thanks] Mohammed and Moses and Jesus and Buddha . . . for stitching the hides of holy books into boxing gloves so we can pound each other to bloody ash (22)

Second, *Yours*, by Kristen Eliason is the epistolary forerunner to *Picture Dictionary*, where the latter’s humor, hesitancy, and disorientation can be observed in embryo. Third, Elizabeth C. Garcia’s *Stunt Double* manages in thirty pages to touch on material as disparate as *Bulfinch’s Mythology*, virginity checks, Wonder Woman’s male stunt double, the Elephant Man, and God-as-intern before the foundation of the world. This she does in a variety of forms, including the demanding villanelle. Fourth is *Memories as Contraband* by Simon Peter Eggersten. Much good could be said of it, but I will close with mere appreciation through quotation:

When I die, God, let me live on in color and spice.

...

Make my nerves blue ribbons, my bones pale
porcelain dust stirred up by the hooves of mustangs.

Flick the green light out of the corner of my eye,
send it swift to the cemeteries in Yemen.

Use some of my ash to pollinate Zanzibari spice—
cinnamon, cloves, or ylang ylang.

Set me to sliding among red cherries and Julie
mangos, danced by an Argentine tango, the voice
of Carlos Gardel. (25)

After months of reading, I have concluded that despite being fairly ignored by scholars of Mormonism in general, the poets covered in this

essay contribute in significant ways to the pulsing vivarium otherwise known as Mormon studies. Not only that, but the rate is accelerating at which relevant and worthwhile poetry is appearing. So it would seem to me to be an unnecessary oversight if these books went unnoticed or unread.⁵ I recognize that most of us received poor poetry educations and that the thought of integrating poetry (*contemporary* poetry of all things) into our reading habits in the twenty-first century is more easily repressed than entertained. But ignorance in these matters is an invitation, not an excuse, to resist whatever metrophobia was planted in us as teenagers. Not a poet myself, I have aimed to persuade readers that the potent variety of this material will be sufficient to generate critical conversations, however modest at first. It is my belief that when poet, critic, student, and scholar undertake together the cultivation of verbal artistry as an end in itself, language is enriched, thought is clarified, and visions for the future dilate. For these reasons, I recommend the work of these understudied writers and encourage attentiveness toward what should appear in the months and years ahead.

5. The essay on literature in the recent *Oxford Handbook of Mormonism* by Michael Austin, who does excellent work, mentions poetry only once in a passing reference to Orson F. Whitney's *Elias*.

TO BE YOUNG, MORMON, AND TONGAN

Moana Uluave-Hafoka

In his article “Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education,” Professor Bryan Brayboy posits that our stories are our theories.¹ I feel most comfortable in story. As both a Mormon and a Tongan, I have used stories to educate and edify.

I learned how to read (in English and Tongan) through family scripture study. I remember blowing the *palangi* first grade teacher away when I used “abomination” and “iniquity” to describe my day. Stories have been the way I’ve understood the world and this experience of life—stories of Jesus, of Nephites, of Lamanites, of Tonga, of migration, of assimilation, of Salome.

Let me provide some context for the stories I’m about to tell.

Tonga boasts the highest percentage of Mormons of any nation, nearly 60 percent.²

There are approximately 57,000 Tongans in the US, and Utah is home to one in four Tongans.

There are approximately only 200,000 Tongans worldwide, 100,000 in Tonga and 100,000 in the diaspora.

1. Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy, “Toward a Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education,” *The Urban Review* 37, no. 5 (December 2005): 425–46.

2. Sixty percent of the island self-identify as Mormon. See <https://www.mormonnewsroom.org/facts-and-statistics/country/tonga/>.

So let us begin here. With these statistics, it may be safe to say that the majority of Tongans in America either are, have been, or are related to Mormons.

The LDS faith was a great impetus for many Tongan families to immigrate to the States, but so was the promise of education and economic stability.

The first wave of Tongans who came in the '50s were largely Mormon pioneers, and those who followed were tied to those who came first. My paternal grandparents arrived in Hawaii in the late '60s, my mother came in the late '70s, and after my parents married they arrived in Utah in the late '80s just in time for me to be born in the Salt Lake Valley.

To be honest, I don't know much about my ancestry before Mormonism. Those stories have been largely silenced or erased. The beginning was always conversion: baptism—rebirth. The rest of history are names to be recorded in genealogy books to be taken to the temple and saved there.

As I trace the lines of my Mormon lineage, it is a line of women that have brought me to this very place.

My paternal grandmother Salome joined the Church after her faith in Mormon missionaries' healing power saved her from polio. Against the wishes of her husband, in-laws, and the entire village, she was baptized. My maternal grandmother Tava was baptized as a child and, although her parents did not become members, she and her brother would walk to Primary alone each Sunday. Losaline, my mother, left home, not knowing if she'd ever return, to live in a new country and learn a new language while attending BYU.

These stories hold both power and pain for me. What was required of these women to convert?

Before Grandma Salome's death, when her memory was no longer linear, she'd often weep and tell me how shortly after joining the Church, three of her young children passed away. The village ridiculed her and said it was the curse of the Mormons. Even though these events had

transpired nearly sixty years prior, she spoke of it as if her children had just died.

My mother has often described the time my grandfather took her to the airport with a plane ticket that took years of saving to pay for. When it was time to leave, my grandfather embraced her and said, “you may never return to home, find your own life and know that we gave you all that we could. If we do not meet in this life, we will in the next.”

Grandma Tava never talks much about details of her childhood. Her silence may point to some trauma and sadness. She cries often about the humility her parents had in order to let her be baptized at nine.

Too often these stories aren’t even told. And even when they are told, they are sanitized for mainstream Mormon consumption under the patriarchal white gaze, which always emphasizes the completeness of our conversions and extermination of our cultural heritage. These are the programed Sunday School responses and takeaways:

They had so much faith.

They feared God more than man.

Families can be together forever.

All the above may be true, but what also happened? What was required for my foremothers?

They had to:

Forget their familial ties

Forsake their ancestral lands and eventually, their ancestral tongue.

There are consequences for forgetting and forsaking. Even the Book of Mormon teaches us this. It teaches us that clinging to preferred and convenient narratives is an abomination and can thus lead to our complete and utter destruction.

Today, as a young Tongan, Mormon, woman, I am seeing the prophecies unfold.

Let me provide some context for the stories I am about to tell.³

Sixty-six percent of Tongans are low income or live in poverty in the United States (47 percent are low income, 19 percent live in poverty).

Only 13 percent of Tongans graduate with a bachelor's degree in the US.

Tongans are plagued by negative stereotypes that characterize them as aggressive, gang bangers, stupid athletes, and as prone to getting knocked up at young ages.

So let us begin again here with these statistics.

I was born and raised on the west side of Salt Lake City. My parents carried the dream of my grandparents in their search for economic stability and educational opportunity. For my family, most of these dreams have had to be deferred, as we have encountered a system that has racialized us into flat, negative stereotypes. Contrary to common Mormon belief, the church does not function outside of the confines of sociological trends but within them, often amplifying them from the pulpit.

As a child, I learned to be proper, obedient, and submissive to the paintings of the white Jesus that hung in our home. One day we'd receive our paradisiacal glory as a fair and beautiful people. In our church classrooms, I was taught to dismiss our *fahu* system that honored and respected women's voices and, instead, adhere to the strict patriarchy that is the celestial order.

As I watched many of my fellow Tongan family members and friends' inability to conform, I was asked to make the same sacrifice as my foremothers had once done:

Forget my familial ties.

Forsake my ancestral lands and my ancestral tongue.

And I did so. Because all the promises of heaven were tied to this. But there are consequences for forgetting and forsaking.

3. See the 2010 US Census (<https://www.census.gov/2010census/>).

I wonder if my grandmothers would have joined so fervently, so resolutely, had they known the complicated journey ahead. Had they fully understood the weight of their sacrifice. A sacrifice that would be tested by racial, socioeconomic, and gender discrimination from the very institution that said would save them.

Maybe they knew that we would adapt and survive. But the survival of us, Tongans, with our few numbers and many believers has been a difficult task.

It becomes increasingly more difficult to believe as my foremothers did and still do.

Before mainstream Mormonism started noticing young white millennials were no longer in the pews, we were already playing in the streets. We were brought here but not wanted here. Our numbers reflected in the semi-annual reporting, our quarters and dimes counted towards the building of Zion, our names recorded in the book of Heaven, but our presence void. Sione had already been absent from the sacrament lines for *kava* sessions; Mele had already skipped Young Women's for friends of other faiths.

We, as the young, Mormon, and Tongan generation, have not been here for some time. But that has not meant that we no longer believed the faith tradition that our foremothers sacrificed so much for.

We have always been comfortable with duality, multiplicity.

To be young, Mormon, and Tongan can mean daily Book of Mormon reading in a concrete cell; tribal tattoos under white shirt and tie.

To be young, Mormon, and Tongan can mean belief in Maui and Jesus; belief in the temples' promises but never knowing if you'd receive them.

To be young, Mormon, and Tongan means we did not lose our faith in anti-literature while studying at BYU-Provo. Those institutions did not even admit us unless our bodies could move from yard line to goal.

To be young, Mormon, and Tongan means our faith has been separate and complicated.

For decades now, we have been praying West of the Temple in the shadows; relying on the one true God to liberate us from our poverty, and sins.

To be young, Mormon, and Tongan means we live on the margins of Mormondom.



I end with this testimony that
I found God in the land of the long white cloud and the high place
in the mountains;

Hip hop and reggae moves me to reverence
To appreciate the divine.
Jesus is found in all places;
In *kava* circles,
In my aunt's' loud laughter,
In Amanaki's prison cell,
In my daughter's small, chubby hands,
Jesus is her.

To be young, Mormon, and Tongan means to live on the margins
of Mormondom;

Maybe it is because we still believe in the gods of our foremothers;
or maybe it's because we have forsaken them.

At Least

C Dylan Bassett

1.

god enters the man & the man
gets delirious

I lie down on my shadow

(the dry riverbed
leaves a trail through)

as god lies down on me

a delirium
some call knowing

like standing in the weather

which is what the weather is

2.

a red blanket for anarchy

a window for what

god is not
perceived but

perceived with
the sun gleams down
from its blue tower

a vase of fatigued flowers

more and more these days

the light finds
only parts of me

3.

is that lightning briefly

lighting up the field's field
enough to prove

myself in myself lured

as close as I've come
to knowing to the touch

god is a feeling I get

just before
falling asleep

a nothingness more real

than nothing else

The Goodness of Created Things

Susan Elizabeth Howe

Amber, formerly pine sap where ant wings settled, feathers, the occasional tiny frog. A drop of the Jurassic Age I wear around my neck.

A Chop Wizard with its plastic cup, blades, hand crank tearing into the onion like a cheetah, membrane and flesh.

Framed color plates of *The Wild Flowers of England*, from which I am learning *bladder wort*, *purple spurge*, and four varieties of *orchis*.

Caprese salad. Tomatoes and fresh basil I attribute to God, but the peasants of Capri imagined they could milk a buffalo.

Middlemarch, giving me the English Midlands whole and Dorothea, led trusting into *The Key to All Mythologies*—its twisted passages, miasmas, vampire bats—and coming back alive.

Rachmaninoff's "Eighteenth Variation on a Theme of Paganini" in a music box of Italian inlaid wood I inherited from my mother. Sound pure as mountain bluebells, mechanism Swiss.

A Swarovski pen in rose pearl, my maroon suede notebook, a copper gill. Hand-tatted snowflakes.

Many items still to come offered now and then by the sensual god, the god of extend yourself, the god of small beautiful puzzles, the god of this was your mother's—all the minor gods of happiness and taste.

Choose Your Own Belief: Of Sharks, Art, & God

Sherilyn Olsen

Introduction

Since *hope is a thing with feathers that perches in the soul*,
Then, belief is the feather vane
holding it together.

And what you believe may be what I know
or, the other way around.
Maybe we don't believe at all.

Chapter I

Sharks are evil
which is why you will never swim with them—
especially not while caged—
where in a moment of weakness, you might dare open your eyes
only to meet up close a steely one of theirs
as they stealth-swim inches from your prison
and you forfeit a piece of your soul.

If you believe, go on to Chapter II
If not, go directly to Chapter IX

Chapter II

When we finally
evolve
to access the other two thirds of our brain
the human race will actually begin to
devolve.

Until then
equality among us remains a dream
governed by Hypnos from his ebony bed in Hades,
sprinkled by Mr. Sandman, who is probably wearing a letterman's jacket,
and captured in the BFG's jar for safekeeping.

So for now
education is both your life force and poison.

If you believe, go on to Ch. III

If not, skip to Ch. V

Chapter III

Even though you will never really give up Diet Coke
you still believe in yourself on the whole

so you

Keep stopping at parks to swing
Keep talking to your children (who are eating chicken and rice) about
current events
Keep dreaming of the art scene in Seattle
Keep dreaming of life in NYC where you've only visited, but know you belong
Keep vacuuming the house even when no one is coming over

Keep studying Psalms and Mosiah for clues
Keep questioning “truth”
Keep reading poetry in place of therapy
Keep selfishly teaching the art of communication to one day master it yourself
Keep spending more time alone
Keep finding babies in your dreams

Go on to Ch. IV

Chapter IV

You want to

see more

read more

write more

sky.

If you agree, go to Ch. V

If not, skip to Ch. VI

Chapter V

You live in a world where President Trump is fact and the world of Harry Potter is fiction. You believe the opposite.

If you're for Trump, go back to Ch. I

If you're for HP, go on to Ch. VI

Chapter VI

Believing in people feels a little bit like not knowing whether the eventual, promised drop on your rafting trip is a three-foot dip over a gurgly rapid, or a fifty foot, cataractous plunge of body-swallowing doom.

But you still do.

You believe in them, because, for example, you think there's a researcher out there, who has discovered the cure for cancer, and keeps it from the world, carrying her burden alone. She has decided to protect us from it, because the method for the cure is more horrific than the disease.

Thank you. (You're sorry.)

If you think it might be true, go on to Ch. VII

If not, go to Ch. IX

Chapter VII

You don't believe
that this is all there is—
this one life—
the last ounce of water on a desert hike
the last seventh grader picked during PE square dancing
or even the last time you saw the one you were never supposed to love.

No,
there is more—
an alternate universe where
Michael Jackson's secret children

spend their days choreographing and performing
brilliant art
you might never see.

And that's just the beginning of
more.

Believers go on to Ch. VIII
Non-believers, The End

Chapter VIII

Trees talk to each other
through their root systems.

Whether old
deep and intricate
as the wrinkles on a centurion's face
or new
weak and growing
like the fingers of a newborn's hand

they talk.

With vibrations they stir their ocean of dirt
sending waves we can't feel to trees in other lands.

They praise their Creators
and they sing
of oxygen and water and sun.

They whisper stories
about predators
like us.

It's happening underneath you.

Move on to Ch. IX

Chapter IX

God is

Heavenly Mother,
who, pregnant with her Earth belly
liked you even when you were thirteen
and Heavenly Father,
who you have pictured all your life resting on a throne
but you know now is more active than that
and the Holy Spirit,
who sometimes settles behind your ribcage
and fills you from the center outward with liquefied light,
and your brother, Jesus Christ,
who took one for the whole team
and yet somehow would walk just you home
carrying your backpack, as you hop over sidewalk cracks.

They are
one word.

Either way, The End

AMEN

Johnny Townsend

“Dear Heavenly Father,” I began, “please help me do well on this test.” I was on my way to the Garfield Community Center in the Central District to take a skills test for a City job as a cashier. “Please help me to—”

Stop it, Ron, I told myself. There’s no God. Stop praying for stuff. It’s a simple math test. Just take it.

I looked at my watch. The 106 was due any minute. If it had come early, though, I’d have to wait another twenty minutes for the next bus. “Dear Heavenly Father,” I prayed, “please help the bus be on time.”

Stop it.

The bus was either about to come or it wasn’t. Even if there were a God, he could hardly create an extra bus complete with bus driver and passengers. If the bus came on time, great. If not, I’d have to deal with it. I’d left the house with plenty of time to spare.

The sun was hot on this late August afternoon. But we’d had a decent summer here in Seattle, only eight days above ninety, most days in the upper seventies to about eighty degrees. It could have been worse.

“Thank you, Heavenly Father,” I began.

Oh, good grief.

I’d been raised Mormon, taught to “pray always.” Even after being excommunicated thirty years ago, I’d kept my belief in God, despite all evidence to the contrary. The last few years, though, I simply found it was impossible to believe anymore.

Ah, there was the bus coming over the top of the hill. I breathed a sigh of relief and grabbed my Orca Lift card which let me pay half fare. I’d only been able to find a part-time job the past year and a half after losing my full-time job at the bank, and every month was a struggle to

pay the bills, even with Jeremy's help. I needed that cashier job. It would require constant traveling to a dozen or more locations—some job sites requiring me to board three different buses to get there—but at least the position had benefits.

“Dear Heavenly Father—”

I climbed onto the bus and found a seat.

I'd loved the Mormon idea of eternal progression, taking as long to reach perfection as my personality required. God had always been a benevolent force in my life. The bad things in the world happened because of Satan.

But there sure were a lot of bad things.

What kind of god worth worshipping was weaker than Satan, or gave him a free hand, allowed him to cause so much misery to both humans and animals? And plants and insects, too, for that matter. I'd always accepted that “there must needs be opposition in all things,” that misery helped us to “grow,” but the absolute degree of suffering that existed was far too great to justify. I remembered seeing on television once a clip from a home movie that had been shot by a murderer as he promised a handcuffed couple that he'd torture and kill their baby before killing them, hitchhikers who'd accepted the wrong free ride. The look on their faces was a pitiful combination of both despair and resignation. I was still haunted by it.

What possible “growth” experience could this family need to justify what they were about to endure? And what did it say about a God whose best plan to “help” his children was to allow such horror?

The bus pulled onto Rainier, and I thought about switching to the 7. It would probably be a little faster, but I hated transfers, and I still had one more bus to catch at a minimum. I decided to stick with the 106.

I sure hoped I did okay on this math test. It would be simple arithmetic, and after all, I did have a biology degree, which gave me plenty of practice in both physics and chemistry. I could certainly add up a few

figures. But what if my calculator died? What if I hit the wrong button in my arrogance? What if my pencil broke?

“Dear Heavenly Father, please—”

I felt so guilty for not finishing my prayers. Wouldn't these half-finished pleas irritate Heavenly Father?

What kind of God would want to be pestered non-stop even by completed petitionary prayers that did nothing but emphasize my selfish needs and desires? I'd heard a rabbi say once that only prayers of praise were appropriate. But what kind of God needed to have his ass kissed every day? I thought maybe prayers asking God to help others, the poor, the sick, those in war-torn countries, those in prison, might be acceptable, but what kind of God withheld his aid from the needy until some random third person requested he step in?

I saw an East African immigrant in a hijab running for the bus on Martin Luther King. There was no way she was going to make it on time. I wanted to pray for her, but it was pointless. She'd either make it or she wouldn't.

She didn't make it.

Was it my fault?

Oh, Ron.

I'd been fighting the compulsion to pray for six months now. I sometimes went long stretches, five hours or more, without being tempted, but whenever a real “crisis” came along, I found myself reverting to my old habits. Like when I had to have blood drawn and wanted the phlebotomist to hit the vein right on the first try, or when someone wanted to return an item to the drugstore but didn't have their receipt and I had to satisfy both the customer and the manager.

I needed to do well on this test.

Before long, we were at the Mount Baker Transit Center, and I stepped off the bus and walked over to the 48 sign, checking the schedule. The bus should be here in just two more minutes. Unless it had come early.

“Dear—”

Deal with it, Ron, I told myself. Deal with it.

If there were a God, he wouldn't want me to depend so heavily on him, must have been annoyed as hell at me all these years. He'd want me to fend for myself, overcome my challenges and make something of my life. He'd want *me* to do that, not him. He would already know what *he* could do.

I still thought of God as a he, comfortable with this bit of patriarchy, despite what that probably said about me.

A young black woman with a baby stroller walked over to the 48 sign as well. And a middle-aged Latino man.

Just the other few people at this same bus stop probably needed more help than I did. Why should God, if there were such a being, want to help *me*? If there were truly a benevolent being out there, it certainly rationed its assistance.

The 48 pulled up a moment later, and I waited for the others to board. Then I found a seat in the first row past priority seating so I could still see out the front window and be on the lookout for the community center. I wasn't very familiar with the neighborhood around Garfield.

I'd been five days late with my last mortgage payment, and I was three months—three months!—behind on my Visa bill. If I didn't pass this test, and the subsequent interview, Jeremy and I weren't going to make it. He was a self-employed contractor but only did piddly little jobs that hardly brought home any more money than my part-time minimum wage job. We faced disaster every month, and given that there was in fact no supreme being to protect us, our luck wasn't going to hold out forever. I *had* to get this job. It was up to *me*.

We passed the Northwest African American History Museum and kept heading north on 23rd. We passed the Sojourner Truth Library and kept going.

I missed Heavenly Father. Even if he wasn't real, I used to *think* he was. I talked to him all the time, not just about my immediate needs but also about my dreams and goals and what things he might want of

me. I felt the way now that I had all those years ago when my mother died of leukemia.

But praying wasn't a harmless habit. It shifted responsibility from me to someone else. And it was important—essential—that I take responsibility for myself. *I* needed to fight for a fifteen dollar minimum wage. *I* needed to fight against fracking. *I* needed to work to restore voting rights to disenfranchised ex-convicts. It wasn't enough to ask God to "help me" do these things. It was up to me to *do* them.

The glory was supposed to go to God, though, wasn't it? It wasn't right to take credit myself.

There was Garfield High School. The community center couldn't be far away. Yes, there it was. I pulled the cord and made my way to the door.

Stepping off the bus, I looked at my watch. It was 6:05. I was fifty-five minutes early. I walked into the building, located the room where the testing would take place, and then walked back outside and sat on a wooden bench in the shade. I watched a mother with two young children about eight or nine years old enter the building. I could hear shouts from kids playing somewhere inside.

The funny thing was, it should have been clear all along that prayer was useless. I remembered a general conference when one of the apostles had said that we should "pray as if everything depended on God, and work as if everything depended on us." Of *course* everything depended on us. Even they knew it. The problem was that if I was praying as if the solution to a given problem depended on God, then psychologically, I was going to be affected by the belief he was going to help, and I was unconsciously going to work with just a little less dedication myself.

A chunky black woman in her twenties across the street was yelling at someone down the block, quite angry about some terrible thing the other person had apparently done. Curse words flew about left and right. A child walking up to the community center seemed oblivious.

It took me a minute to realize there was no one at the other end of the block.

I still allowed myself to say one complete prayer a day. As I was falling asleep next to Jeremy each evening, I thanked Heavenly Father—or the universe, or whatever—for at least ten specific good things that had happened to me that day. It was more an exercise in gratitude than a real prayer, but I still addressed it formally.

And always felt guilty immediately afterward for doing so.

Was I ever going to grow up? I was fifty-six years old, for crying out loud. I felt guilty for praying and I felt guilty for not praying. When was I ever going to just live my life?

At 6:30, I walked back into the community center and, as I'd expected, the proctors let the candidates into the multi-purpose room early to find our seats. I'd taken this test last year, done well, and then flubbed the interview. But just before the last test, I'd chatted with a few other nervous candidates, encouraging them. I didn't want to be mean today, but I had to perform better than everyone else. I couldn't afford to be "nice."

So were atheists by definition more selfish than believers?

I'd attended a meeting last night to fight for rent control, and I didn't even pay rent.

I stared at my calculator and pencils and eraser. I stared at the wall. I didn't make eye contact with any other candidates.

At 7:00, the proctors handed out the tests, and we turned them over and began working. I had to add and subtract these columns of simple figures. Multiply three dance classes times the fee. Decide if several rows of addresses were the same or different.

A child could do this.

I remembered that my boss at Rite Aid had fired three new employees over the past few months because they couldn't count their till at the end of their shift.

There were thirty candidates in today's session taking the test, and this was only one of two sessions. I had to beat *sixty* people to get this one miserable job. Jeremy and I were going to lose the house if I didn't.

I'd applied for over five hundred jobs—five hundred!—in the past year. It always came down to the interview, the six times I managed to get one. I had to do better in my interviews.

“Dear Heavenly Father—”

The realization that there was no God struck me again as if for the first time, and my throat constricted. I wasn't strong enough to do this on my own. I *needed* God.

The last question indicated that I was supposed to leave a till filled with one hundred dollars in bills. The till currently had one twenty, three fives, and a ten dollar roll of quarters. What additional amount in bills did I need to leave? I smiled. Most people were going to say they needed fifty-five dollars more, but the quarters didn't count. They weren't bills.

I finished the test, sure I'd answered every single simple question accurately. I stood up and handed my test to a proctor, the first person in the room to do so. I walked back outside, crossed the street to wait for the 48 going back to Mount Baker. A frail, elderly black woman with osteoporosis waited patiently with her cart of groceries. A young white man talked loudly on his cell phone. An obese black woman who'd tested with me crossed the street and joined us a moment later. She looked at me and smiled.

I wanted to pray.

When the bus pulled up a few minutes later, I climbed on board, paid my fare, and found a seat on the shady side of the bus near the back door. A teenage black girl with huge earrings texted on her phone in the row in front of me. A forty-something black man in stained work clothes took a sip from an old Coke bottle filled with water. I stared out the window at some graffiti sprayed on a tottering wooden fence as we slowly pulled away from the curb.



Tyler Swain
Portrait 2, Eggplant

That We May Be One: A Personal Journey

Tom Christofferson. *That We May Be One: A Gay Mormon's Perspective on Faith and Family*. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Company, 2017. 154 pp. Paper. \$15.99 ISBN: 9781629723914.

Reviewed by Gerald S. Argetsinger

Tom Christofferson's *That We May Be One* exploded onto the LDS book market with a series of news releases, interviews, and appearances.¹ It represents a gigantic leap in the Deseret Book LDS conversation on LGBTQ+ (hereafter: gay) members since the publication of Ty Mansfield's *In Quiet Desperation: Understanding the Challenge of Same-gender Attraction*.² Even the use of the descriptor "gay" in place of "same-gender attraction" still raises the hackles of many in the faith.³ In contrast to Mansfield's desperate struggle, Tom Christofferson declares "There is nothing intrinsically about who I am that is offensive to God."⁴ Behind that statement is

1. Such as "Gay Mormon author, brother of an apostle, builds bridges between the LDS and LGBTQ communities," interview by Jana Riess, *Religion News Service*, 5 October 2017; "Mormon apostle's gay brother shares his religious journey," interview by Peggy Fletcher Stack, *Salt Lake Tribune*, 17 Sept 2017; "Mormon & Gay," interview by Jamie Armstrong, *LDS Living*, September/October 2017, pp. 26–35; "Becoming One: Panel Discussion with Tom Christofferson on LGBT Inclusion in the LDS Church," Deseret Book Facebook Live, 5 October 2017; and *That We May Be One*, KSL Television, Salt Lake City, 15 October 2017.

2. Ty Mansfield, Fred Matis, and Marilyn Matis, *In Quiet Desperation: Understanding the Challenge of Same-gender Attraction* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 2004)

3. See, for example, "There are no homosexual members in the church," YouTube video, from an interview with David A. Bednar and others, 23 February 2016.

4. Jamie Armstrong, "Mormon and Gay: One Man's Journey Away From the Church and Back Again," *LDS Living*, 16, iss. 91 (Sep./Oct. 2017): 32.

the strength of Deseret Book Company, its president, Sherri Dew (ostensibly the most powerful woman in the LDS Church), and the author's brother, Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve. *That We May Be One* can be divided into "Tom's Coming Out Story," "Tom's Advice to the Parents of Gay Youth," "Tom's Rediscovery of the Church," and "Tom's Divine Mandate for Gay Mormons." Tom's "coming out" story is similar to most gay young men in the LDS Church. He believed that spiritual development, church service, serving a mission, and getting married in the temple would change his sexual orientation. Like other gay Mormons, he learned that he was wrong. Shortly after his temple wedding, Tom discovered that trying to be married to a woman was impossible for him. He realized that to be honest with his life, he must travel a different path. In the early 1980s a person could be excommunicated from the LDS Church merely for "coming out," so Tom first called his brother Greg, then his parents and other brothers explaining that he was going to be divorced and ask to be excommunicated because he was homosexual. While this represents the typical tragedy of the young gay Mormon, this is where Tom's experience begins to be atypical.

Tom proceeds to demonstrate how his family's Mormon faith, heritage, and reaction were similar to other Mormon parents who discovered that their son is gay. They were devastated. They wept and prayed. His brother Greg sought out a LDS social service counselor who worked extensively with homosexuality to ask how Tom could be "fixed." Then his parents called a family council, where Tom's experience breaks the mold of his time. His mother stated that the most important thing their family could do was to love Tom. It was their responsibility to keep Tom in the family circle. That declaration made all the difference in the world.

Even though his family understood that the circumstances within the Church at that time meant there was no place for Tom, his family demonstrated unconditional love for him. For two decades, his parents focused on the joy of the times they had together. They ensured that Tom and his partner were always included in every family gathering.

Tom writes, “They weren’t waiting for me to return to church before they could fully love me” (23–24). The Spirit confirmed that this was God’s plan for them.

The majority of *That We May Be One* addresses the parents and leaders of gay youth with lessons Tom learned as an out gay man who was loved unconditionally by his family. One of the strengths of the volume is that it follows the pattern of other Deseret Books discussing gospel topics by quoting scriptures and commentary by various Church leaders. These emphasize how to live in the light of the present rather than in the shadow of future uncertainties; how parents and leaders of gay members can move on after the initial shock of discovery wears off. Tom concludes with how being gay is one of the great blessings of his life.

That We May Be One repeatedly emphasizes that gay individuals must learn for themselves what God’s path is for each of them. This is underlined by the publisher’s introduction as well as by the author. Loving parents can create the environment for experiences, both temporal and spiritual, that their children need to find and follow their own path. His lesson is that if his family could support him, given their background and church experience, then anyone’s family can support their gay children, siblings, and relatives.

Tom returns to his personal history describing how, without really intending to do so, he was eventually re-baptized a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He had never left family and cultural Mormonism, but he began to long for more spiritual experiences. And so, he began to quietly attend sacrament meetings in the nearby New Canaan, Connecticut chapel. The experience of his slow immersion back into the Church is a quintessential lesson for Church leaders on how to interact with their own gay members, both those who are coming out and those who are again exploring whether or not there is a place for them. Tom’s bishop allowed him to live the law he had and to mature line upon line as he slowly moved toward full activity. This also impacted his relationship with his partner of twenty years, whom

he still loves despite his inability to join Tom on his spiritual journey. To those on their own journeys, Tom concludes, “may God bless you for your determination to bear the burdens of those you love, for your willingness to wrestle with angels” (89). In the final pages, Tom tells about the restoration of his priesthood and temple ordinances. He bears witness that each of us is unique and that each of us is worthy of the love of our families. He describes how we cannot live perfectly, but we can learn to love perfectly (140).

Announcements of the pending publication of *That We May Be One* were mixed in the gay LDS community. Gay individuals have individual paths. But the concern that “Tom’s journey” might be prescribed as “*the* journey” is clearly denied several times within the book itself. From the first pages of the publisher’s preface and Tom’s introduction, it is made clear that this book is about Tom’s personal journey and that it should not be considered the only true journey. Tom often states how important it is for every gay member, their parents, and their church leaders to remain close to the Spirit so that each individual can find and be supported in the journey that has been appointed them by God.

Less successful is the concern about Tom’s dealing with the November 2015 handbook change that declares that Mormons engaged in same-sex marriages are considered apostates and their under-eighteen-year-old children are denied church blessings, baptism, and ordinations to the priesthood. After age eighteen, those children who renounced their gay parents’ unions can receive the ordinances of the Church. The topic is given its own chapter but is more brushed aside than confronted.

The final concern, that Tom’s journey might be co-opted by those with their own agendas, is more directed to the book’s readers. On the surface, it might seem easy to pass off Tom Christofferson’s story as a straightforward prodigal son tale of the “return of the sinner” (Luke 15:11–32). It should be clear that is a perversion of Tom’s journey. The Bible’s prodigal son collects his inheritance, leaves home to seek his fortune, and falls in with evil companions who beguile him for their

own lustful purposes. Broken, the youth returns home where his father rejoices at the return of his wayward son. The youth pays for his greed, stubbornness, and transgression.

Tom's story is different. It is the tale of the son who is obedient in all things. He suffers unbearably in spite of his obedience and sorrowfully leaves his family because there is no place for him because of the traditional rules of his society that condemn him merely for who he is. Nevertheless, his father, mother, and family vow to love and support him on his journey. They celebrate his accomplishments and include him and those he loves in their family gatherings. Through time, their society begins to change. Feeling the need for the spiritual blessings, the son quietly seeks out the company of that society in his own land. He is fortunate to find loving leaders who welcome him as one of their own and show him that there is now a place for him alongside his brothers and sisters. The combined love of his parents, family, and spiritually aware leaders invite him back to the home he had been forced to flee.

That We May Be One is the book gay Mormons have been waiting for. It should be required reading for every LDS Church leader. Whether you know it or not, there are gay members in your congregations. Tom Christofferson has provided an example and a guidebook based on his family's experiences coupled with scriptures and stories from their Mormon heritage. Together we can all experience the joy with which Tom proclaims, "I am a happy gay Mormon" (xvi).

The Making of a Hard, Then Softened Heart in *The Book of Laman*

Mette Harrison. *The Book of Laman*. Salt Lake City, Utah: By Common Consent Press, 2017. 238 pp. Paper: \$9.95. ISBN: 978-0998605241.

Reviewed by Laura Hilton Craner

A fallen prophet. An abandoned wife and mother. A starving little brother. A big brother whose street smarts and steel are the linchpin to his family's survival. The cast of Mette Harrison's alternative telling of the beginning of the Book of Mormon is a motley and earthly one, striking a deep contrast to the lofty start of Nephi's scriptural telling. Gritty and as unforgiving of himself as he is of his earthly and Heavenly fathers, the central character of Laman, as painted by Harrison, is an everyman for the modern Saint with a struggle and his story is, in many ways, just as truthful as Nephi's.

The novel starts well before Nephi's birth and introduces us to a family that is as far from his "goodly parents" (I Nephi 1:1) as a family can get. Lehi and Sariah still live in Jerusalem but Lehi is not yet the visionary man of scripture. He is a drunk who runs out on his wife and two small sons because, when it comes right down to it, he prefers the attention of upbraiding crowds on the street. When Sariah tries to explain away his behavior as "telling stories," Laman responds with a scathing, "He was good at telling stories, but the problem was, they were never true" (1). And with that, the true conflict of every scriptural story is set up: how do you choose faith when the truth telling can't be parsed from the storytelling?

Laman's telling hits all the high and low points that scripture outlines, from Laban and the plates to the journey across the sea to building the

temple in the Promised Land, ending with Laman's death after Nephi and his people leave. Despite the drama of each plot point, the real drama happens in Laman's heart, where no matter how many angels he sees and how many times his prophet-father and prophet-brother testify to him, the overwhelming practical needs of taking care of his family (and later Nephi's) override any faith-promoting narrative presented. The trauma of being abandoned by Lehi in his early, most vulnerable years and seeing him rave drunkenly in the streets and chase after women while trying to support Sariah and protect Lemuel leaves a deep and untrusting scar on the young Laman's heart. This scar, developed over years of hardship and fear, isn't the kind that can be wiped away through a single prayer or a sweeping vision. It can only be understood and healed by a Savior and that Savior is strikingly absent from the narratives Lehi and Nephi present. With only the chastisement of his father and brother on the one side and the needs of his family on the other, Laman's best choice is usually what he believes is his only choice: to toughen up and soldier on. He doesn't have time for visions or prayers or temples; he's too busy feeding his and Nephi's children and brokering an uneasy peace between the varying factions in their new society.

Despite the hardness of Laman's heart, he is a deeply sympathetic character. Harrison, much like her leading man, pulls no punches when it comes to calling out anyone in the story. Nephi is a diligent prophet, but his rigidity often leaves those he is meant to save out to dry. Sam is a good brother, but his indecisive nature increases the struggle for those around him. Sariah is a faithful and forgiving woman, which is sometimes her greatest strength and sometimes her greatest flaw. Laman is often mean and callous, but is also incredibly aware and mindful of the needs of all around him and is in many cases a truth teller just like his little brother. You can't help but cringe when he goes wrong and then root for him when does right.

This searching and well-written narrative is a courageous addition to the many retellings of Book of Mormon stories that dot the land-

scape of Mormon literature. It is also not for the faint of heart. Many LDS readers will be uncomfortable with the too-many-shades-of-gray morality that is Laman's worldview. The story is worth the discomfort, though, if a reader is willing to stick with Laman to the end of his story.

Laman asks difficult questions, ones that seek to tease out not just truth from error but also truth from culture. Implicit in Laman's questioning and struggle is the question and struggle of any member who can't look at the Church with rose-colored glasses. When Laman asks, "Wouldn't it be nice to live in a world where faith and courage were all that was required to get what you wanted?" (78), he is speaking for every modern member who sits in Sunday School each week wondering how they can reconcile the black and white nature of theology with the ever-graying moral universe they inhabit.

Laman's redemption comes at the end of the novel when he is near death and finally granted a vision. It isn't a sweeping one like the Tree of Life, but it is perfectly suited to him. He is granted a vision of Christ, of the Savior he has needed and missed, who has been conspicuously absent from all preaching that Laman has been subjected to his entire life. Christ comes to the temple and blesses Laman's descendants. He tells Laman that he is forgiven and most importantly that, "Your children will one day call you blessed . . . and they will know that no one is ever too far from God to repent" (237).

In the end, Laman relates to the same message that Lehi, Nephi, and all scripture is seeking to pass on: Christ knows each of us individually and is willing to forgive even sinners such as Laman. His mercy covers so much more than we will ever be able to understand. His love can change even the hardest of hearts. We just have to be willing to see Him. Even if it takes an entire lifetime for that willingness to come about, even if you aren't a Nephi, Laman's message is that you are enough. When all the storytelling is done, that's the truth.

Raw Hope and Kindness: *The Burning Point*

Tracy McKay. *The Burning Point: A Memoir of Addiction, Destruction, Love, Parenting, Survival, and Hope*. Salt Lake City, UT: By Common Consent Press, 2017. 274 pp. Paper: \$12.95. ISBN: 978-0998605210.

Review by Mel Henderson

When reading a good book I'll often hop online to supplement or enrich my sensory experience. This time I sought a detailed close-up for mala beads, a tactile sense of the silk handkerchief around a deck of tarot cards, an image of a gilded *ketubah*, and a sense of the gleaming stained glass medallion in the Nauvoo temple—but Tracy McKay's memoir also gave me opportunities to look up some classic songs and spend some time enjoying them through a new auditory "lens." One of the pleasures of reading *The Burning Point* is how it suggests its own soundtrack. It's unlikely that I will hear certain Bob Dylan (or Grateful Dead, or Paul Simon) songs ever again without thinking of McKay's story and re-experiencing the tenderness and courage with which she told it.

Perhaps the first challenge of writing a memoir is believing that your story is worth telling. McKay's story fosters genuine hope. She owns her story and commands it with a confidence that asserts that telling the story matters. It's powerful because there are countless women (and men and children) who never signed up for the train wreck that someone else's choices—someone they love—would make of their lives, and so many of us dearly need true, honest, accessible stories of both survival and forgiveness. We need to know it's possible to heal from the perceived shame of not being able to fix a problem for someone we love.

The (perhaps too-long) subtitle tries to touch on every aspect of the text; the story really is about addiction, destruction, love, parenting, survival, and hope. But more specifically, it chronicles her relationship with her narcotic-addict husband, and his addiction's devastating effect on their hoped-for future and the lives of their family—and then it illuminates the road back from devastation. If there is a central message in this story, it is that you are stronger than you think—but the only way to increase your strength exponentially is by being willing to ask for and receive a community of support. McKay reminds us that this is hard, especially at first. Incredibly hard. But never impossible.

One of the most striking things about this memoir is the kindness and respect with which McKay treats both her ex-husband and herself. She never sugarcoats a single moment of the struggle, but she never throws anyone under the bus, either. McKay is frank and kind when she describes her husband's battle, and she is respectful and honest about her own journey through it. When she describes his arrival to visit his children after a long separation for rehab, she says, "His clear eyes were naked, raw, no longer clouded as they had been the last hundred times [I] had seen him. The insulation of chemicals protecting him from the reality of what he had done was gone, and he stood openly before [me.] [I] couldn't look in his eyes; it hurt too much" (201).

In another passage, when McKay is in the throes of single-motherhood to three young children—one of them autistic—while pursuing a degree, keeping a home business afloat, and living more humbly than she ever imagined she'd have to, she beautifully describes the struggle against self-pity:

I was plagued by doubts and worrying over imagined slights and conversational miscues. I wondered at my own intellect and doubted my own validity as a contributor to anything meaningful. *What was going on?* I knew better than this. Yet the malaise hung close. Narcissus beckoned. The siren's song was powerful . . . I knew better. Self-loathing

and doubt were really no different than self-aggrandizement and ego in the underworld. Both amplified and elevated the importance of self to the exclusion of reality . . . *Snap out of it* . . . Shaking my head to clear the cobwebs, I knew the best step was to immerse myself in something physical, to get out of my own mind . . . [so] I headed downstairs to join the foam swordfight. (149)

McKay's descriptions of the acts of kindness shown to her and to her children in this season of her life are testament to the fact that healing balm is often borne to us in the hands of others. Prayers are sometimes answered through people who have time, ideas, or resources that we don't personally have access to. McKay praises friends and family who helped her with her children, who offered meals, brought their whole family to help with yard work, and especially the bishop who was able to offer her some choices for child care or schooling—opportunities she could never have created for herself at that time. She even dedicates the book to her dear friend Mo, to the two church Relief Societies that bore her through these hardships, and the women at several online resources who encouraged her writing and gave her forums for it. Readers come away marveling at the power of community, and contemplating whether or not they themselves have somehow missed an opportunity to be the sort of support these people were for McKay.

In the end, there were only two things about McKay's memoir that gave me pause—the first a craft/aesthetic concern and the second a broader social one.

Every memoirist, to greater or lesser affect, shoulders the narrative challenge that noted essayist and memoirist Phillip Lopate calls double-perspective, an approach that “allow[s] the reader to participate vicariously in the experience as it was lived . . . while conveying the sophisticated wisdom of one's current self. This second perspective, the author's retrospective employment [is] . . . *a more mature intelligence to*

interpret the past [emphasis added].”⁵ McKay is mostly reliable in executing dual-perspective throughout the memoir, with a few interpretive lapses. For example, it’s unclear when she first meets David (her future husband) what his declarations of being so impressed with her quick mind should mean to the reader. Is this shared to inform us that the author is smarter than average (*what I want you to know about me now*)? Or is it there to say she thought David was trying hard to flatter her (*what I thought he was doing then*)? Was this an opportunity to express to us that her young, searching self was drawn to a man a few years older who admired her mind (*what I think now, about myself, then*)? Or did it mean something else? Because McKay’s writing consistently reveals the compassion she has for all concerned, engaging her mature intelligence in the service of interpreting her young self for readers can only enhance our connection to the story and endear her to us.

Also from a memoir-craft perspective, I sincerely tried to love the “Interludes,” where McKay inserts a stand-alone piece between chapters here or there—each of them another piece of engaging memoir, but differing from the numbered chapters in that they are written about herself in third person, for example, “she had just left the dentist,” or “realization washed over her in a giant wave” (114, 134). In theory, I quite like the idea of a memoirist pulling back from the intensity of the lived experience to briefly observe from the outside, like a detached narrator, even in third person. But I was looking for a discernible pattern: maybe the interludes were meant to be glimpses into humor, or purely solitary moments, or maybe the more unbearable parts, where a third-person buffer could provide some coping distance. But the Interludes featured a variety of scenes, people, dialogue, and emotional intensities, like the regular chapters, and (in the galley proof I read) they were also formatted exactly like the chapters, so I was unable to find unique meaning

5. Phillip Lopate, “Reflection and Retrospection: A Pedagogic Mystery Story,” *The Fourth Genre* 19, no.1 (Spring 2005): 143, doi: 10.1353/fge.2005.0016.

in them. Some sort of clear visual and content distinction might have helped the Interludes to feel more deliberate and purposeful, rather than just a clever idea at play.

My only other concern is that a reader could get the feeling that suffering with a partner's narcotic addiction is extraordinarily rare, even unlikely to happen to anyone you know. We are introduced to no one else in the book whose life has been uprooted by addiction. Over all the years of standing beside David in his struggle, his twelve-step programs, watching him come in and out of rehab, did McKay never meet anyone else with an addicted spouse? Narcotics addiction is a national epidemic, both inside and outside the LDS faith. (Utah has the seventh highest drug overdose rate in the United States.)⁶ Her journey surely felt exquisitely isolating; perhaps it was an artistic choice to reflect that feeling.

Stories can be powerful gifts and catalysts. Because the drug issue is central to her story, I was anticipating an epilogue or an author's note acknowledging the epidemic and perhaps offering resources for readers who need them. Her story strives to foster hope, so hope should be on offer.

All told, *The Burning Point* is a wonderful read. McKay's frank and honest voice is a refreshing antidote to the social shame so often suffered within tightly defined communities where something that "isn't supposed to happen" is happening. I hope her memoir is widely read and shared, because even if addiction never touches our own lives, it will touch someone we love—and no matter our particular hardship, we all need the kind of confidence, compassion, resilience, and hope that McKay freely offers her readers.

6. "Stop the Opioid Epidemic," *Utah Department of Health*, 2016, <http://www.opioidemic.org/>.

Thin Volume, Thick Questions

Luisa Perkins. *Prayers in Bath*. New York: Mormon Artists Group, 2017. 128 pp. Paper: \$14.95. ISBN: 978-1543035155.

Reviewed by Sandra Clark Jergensen

The half-inch thickness of the thin paperback belies its contents. Some context on the limited edition, published by Mormon Artists Group, explains the dense publication: fifty hand-bound copies in Asahi silk, hand numbered, and signed with color reproductions of the four original art pieces created by Jacqui Larsen for the book. There are fifty, they are stunning, and they are selling for \$150 each. This small book was not a small project, speedily or thriftily produced, but three years in the making. Perkins explains, “It’s a short book, but it took a long time to write, to feel like I’d gotten it right;”⁷ *Prayers in Bath* is right in so many ways.

Luisa Perkins does not waste time or pages to display her tight research and writing skills. Using the real life discovery of curse tablets from the ancient Bath ruins, Perkins muses, “What else might be waiting to be dug up in that ancient holy place?”⁸ The story is framed around a young Mormon couple: academics, expats, financially and emotionally exhausted by their repeated and failed attempts at in-vitro fertilization. Ted is absorbed by the distraction of research and teaching, but Julia, finished with her Ph.D. in linguistics and biding time in England for Ted’s work, is mired in depression. Ted arranges for her to intern at an archeological dig in Bath; Julia is put off, but a resounding divine personal

7. Perkins, Luisa, “Prayers in Bath,” *Kashkawan* (blog), March 31, 2017, <http://kashkawan.squarespace.com/novembrance/2017/3/31/prayers-in-bath.html>.

8. Ibid.

confirmation pushes her forward. Julia sifts through the muck of the dig, hoping to recover herself in the ruins, but stumbles over something else.

A small cylinder is crammed into the clay. Instead of alerting her supervisor, Julia pauses at an immediate prompting to risk her position, career future, morality, and faith to pocket the artifact instead. Trusting the weight of the feeling, she stuffs the heavy object into her jacket. Back at her apartment, Julia opens it, finding copper-colored metal scrolls of writing, in an extinct language she is startled to be able to read. The furious translation brings Julia back to life. Ted notices her renewed spark, but, fearing his judgement, she neglects the prompting to show her husband the source.

Using the layered conflicts to pose significant questions to the characters and reader, the story rises above its seeming simplicity. Does God ask individuals, like Nephi, to break the rules for the greater good? Will God continue to use outsiders, like Joseph Smith, to bring forth truth through unconventional means? What do revelation and scripture look like, and how do we know that it is? What if it comes through a woman?

Julia is a woman, a convert, and a criminal (even if inspired)—facts that Ted spits out as soon as Julia is forced to reveal what she hid from him: white lies, pages of translation, and the cylinder full of scrolls stuffed behind the bathroom plumbing. The husband that seemed so supportive, so understanding, cannot see past the accepted Mormon protocol. Ted is a product of the culture he was raised in, “one of those Taylors that go back to John” (6). As a convert/outsider, Julia can see the possibility, power, and congruence Ted is closed off to. She may share his faith, but how they “navigate the tension between personal revelation and institutional revelation” might not align.⁹

Perhaps Julia’s discovery is a fulfillment of the blessing Ted gave her before the final round of IVF? She and Ted had both felt so sure when

9. Perkins, Luisa. Interview by William Morris. “A Conversation with Luisa Perkins About Her Short Novel, *Prayers in Bath*.” *A Motley Vision* (blog), 18 May 2017. <http://www.motleyvision.org/2017/conversation-luisa-perkins-prayers-in-bath/>.

he spoke, “You will bring forth a miracle” (7). It wasn’t what they anticipated she would bring forth, but was it a miracle and confirmation of Glastonbury legend? “That Jesus came to England as a lad with Joseph of Arimathea, his rich uncle . . . it’s not out of the question is it, given what Latter-day Saints know about Christ in America? If he traveled there, why not here?” (67). Why not her to discover it?

Jacqui Larsen’s art seems to reach for answers too. Collaged circles and shapes stacked on one another extend the idea of building and reaching. Circles in circles point at inclusion and exclusion. In the limited edition, the art is electric, colored beyond the blunt grayscale reproductions in the standard edition, but their questions are the same: circle in or push out potential truths that don’t fit into current belief’s shape? How to follow patterns and not be stuck in them? Notably, there are decorative flourishes of Larsen’s shapes at sections beginnings and endings with one exception—the moment Julia catches a pattern in the scroll’s characters: Jesus (50). Following this circle image in the text, Julia is then able to translate.

With such careful attention paid to this thoughtfully provocative story, original art made for the book, and the weight of thoughtful and deftly-handled questions, it’s unfortunate those who proofed the text didn’t take the same care. For example, Ted announces “So I drove over to the abbey” to look for Julia (72), but how? Ted and Julia don’t have a car. Throughout the small book the couple travels by bus or walks wherever they need to go; they are overseas for a short time and living in a city with easy public transportation. Poor enough to count out chocolate-covered biscuits and with their savings wiped clean by failed fertility treatments, they would not be likely to have a car that they do not need. This small hitch does not hold up the story; it’s a glitch. What it does is smell of the state of most small Mormon publishers. It’s expensive to spend time sifting the silt and snarls out off a manuscript, but there’s a lesson in this. Any book that wants to be taken seriously,

that deserves to be taken seriously (and this book wants to and should be), deserves the expense of a clean copy.

Prayers in Bath is a pivotal book that merits the right to ask what it does through the very real characters that breathe them into life. There are no lines of the prayers Julia uttered in Bath, but the answers unearthed from the ruins were profound. Luisa Perkins earns the right to posit her questions and see her book bound as art and with art, because it is art.



The Life of a Spiritualist Saint

Scott H. Partridge, ed. *Thirteenth Apostle: The Diaries of Amasa M. Lyman, 1832–1877*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2016. 1050 pp. Appendix, biographical register, biography, index. Hardcover: \$60.00. ISBN 978–1–56085–236–3.

Reviewed by Cristina Rosetti

In historic accounts of Mormonism's founding leaders, Amasa M. Lyman is often absent. However, despite this absence, Lyman is noteworthy for the many roles he played in the formative years of the Church. He was converted through the missionizing efforts of Lyman E. Johnson and Orson Pratt, served as a missionary who became known for his charismatic preaching, acted as apostle under both Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, led the San Bernardino territory, and was eventually excommunicated for apostasy. For all the roles he played, Lyman's life presents important insight into the complexity and challenges within early Mormonism. In the introductory notes to the volume, Scott Par-

tridge offers insight into this complexity. Speaking of the collection, he writes, “His diaries reveal a serious-minded deeply committed, kind-hearted, empathetic man with a wry sense of humor, whose beliefs and experiences—extensions of what he had been taught as a Mormon convert—came into conflict with the church when he took some of the concepts of Mormon theology to their ultimate conclusions” (9). Through careful transcription and formatting, the diaries beautifully reflect the highs and lows of Church participation, as well as the multiplicity of ways Mormons navigated faith in the early Church.

Thirteenth Apostle: The Diaries of Amasa M. Lyman, 1832–1877 is a compilation of transcribed documents that offer insight into one of Mormonism’s most fascinating leaders. As an edited volume, the text is separated into thirteen sections that arrange the life of the Apostle into key segments. These segments include Lyman’s journey to join the Saints in Kirtland, his colonizing efforts in San Bernardino, the rise of his interest in Spiritualism, and his movement away from orthodox Mormonism toward the Church of Zion led by William S. Godbe. To add context for the reader, each section begins with a historical introduction that summarizes the particular period represented in the documents. As the editor notes in his broader introduction, the documents are part of the larger Amasa Mason Lyman Collection found in the Church History Library. Methodologically, the text seeks to remain true to these original manuscripts; this goal is accomplished through attention to detail and limited editing of the diaries themselves. Aside from date standardization and minor grammatical additions, the volume reflects a careful transcription of Lyman’s life, including the underlining and strikethroughs found in the original manuscripts.

Throughout the volume, Lyman’s lifelong interest in religion and truth stands out as a dominant theme in the Saint’s life. This is true of his faithful days as a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints through his later involvement in the Church of Zion. In each organization, Lyman portrays himself as a man devoted to the search

for knowledge, wherever it may lead. This is not only true for Lyman, but his many associates. Throughout his personal life, as well as the lives of many men and women he encountered on his journey, Lyman espoused themes present in broader Mormon culture. For example, outside of religious involvement, the diaries demonstrate the ways Saints were actively engaged in civic matters. For Lyman, this manifested in his time spent in the San Bernardino territory as an early colonizer and governor and his involvement in the National Free Religion Association and the National Liberal League.

Lyman was a Mormon who dabbled in a variety of metaphysical traditions that developed in the nineteenth century, and his diaries both delve into the life of an early Saint and illuminate the experience of Spiritualists in Utah. As a Spiritualist practitioner, Lyman frequently wrote about his séance attendance and the spirits that visited him to offer insight into the spiritual world. This included the spirit of Joseph Smith, who Lyman wrote highly of in both his mortal and eternal states. In addition to spirits, Lyman also frequently interacted with Spiritual thinkers and mediums who toured the country offering insight into the nature of humanity and interactions between the temporal and spiritual world. As the diaries progress and Lyman becomes increasingly interested in the practice of Spiritualism, the writing reflects changes in language that demonstrate his increasing investment in the movement. Demonstrative of both Lyman's shift to understand the world in terms of Spiritualism, as well as the fine editorial work of the volume, is Lyman's entry of May 1, 1873, of the death of his grandson: "To day my son Amasa [Jr.]'s ^wife^ [Cynthia] was prematurely delivered of a p[a]ir or twin Daughters. They survived their birth but an hour and passed away to Nature under the kindly and humane institutions of the bright land of Sumer in the hap[p]y beyond" (748).

One of the most interesting insights the diaries offer is the glimpse into the life of an excommunicated Saint who had previously devoted his life to the Church. Although Lyman's excommunication came following

his movement toward Spiritualism, the disciplinary action was not a direct result of his Spiritualist practices. Rather, his designation as an apostate stemmed from his preaching doctrines deemed contrary to the church, specifically in reference to the Atonement. Unlike other works on Lyman, this volume offers readers a full transcript of the sermon in question: the Dundee Sermon delivered in March 1862. Within this forceful sermon, Lyman speaks about Jesus' mission and the nature of Atonement, looking to the individual as having a key role to play in their own salvation:

What I find fault with is that when we are told the blood of Jesus will cleanse us from all sin, without any effort on our part to do right, it is virtually a proclamation to us that we can do nothing for ourselves; and then we will sit down supinely waiting for the blood of Jesus to free us from the consequences of the wrongs we are committing—for the word of God that has done and will do to take effect, when we are the authors of the wrongs that exist (952–953).

Even after his excommunication, Lyman continued to be interested in Mormonism. As a member of the Church of Zion under the direction of William S. Godbe, Lyman lived in a world of a Mormonism that existed alongside the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Salt Lake Valley. What remains most compelling from this period, as the editor indicates, is that Lyman's life did not change drastically after his excommunication. Rather, he simply moved into a leadership role under a different Church structure. For students and scholars of Mormonism in the contemporary moment, this aspect of Lyman's life may offer key insight into the ways individuals navigate their involvement in Mormonism.

Scott H. Partridge's edited volume illuminates the life of one of Mormonism's most compelling Saints. Through the publication of his diaries, Signature Books offers readers a glimpse into the life of an early convert and the metaphysical world of early Mormonism. As both a Mormon and a Spiritualist, Lyman lived within the fluid boundar-

ies of orthodoxy and faith. Although Partridge was not alive to see the culmination of his work, this volume will surely serve as a foundational resource for anyone interested in Lyman, the Godbeite movement, and Spiritualism in Utah.



On Apple Seeds, Rats, and the State of Mormon Literature

Steven L. Peck. *Gilda Trillim: Shepherdess of Rats*. Alresford, Hants: Roundfire Books, 2017. 272 pp. Paperback: \$16.00. ISBN: 978-1782798644.

Reviewed by Shane R. Peterson

Steven L. Peck has long been seen as a pioneer in the field of Mormon letters, because of his ability to move beyond the usual clichés and expectations that often come with fiction about the faith. In two of his previous novels, *The Scholar of Moab* and *A Short Stay in Hell*, he successfully moved the genre into the twenty-first century because of his willingness to push boundaries, embrace the unorthodox, and explore difficult themes. His latest contribution, *Gilda Trillim: Shepherdess of Rats*, follows this same vein by branching out into even newer territory, but unfortunately, it often gets lost along the way.

The book itself is not a simple, straight-forward narrative; Gilda is presented not as a point-of-view character, but rather the subject of MA student Kattrim Mender's thesis, which she describes as "an academic work disguised as a novel disguised as an academic work." With limited commentary in the preface, at the beginning of each chapter, and at

the end of her dissertation, she compiles her research with a series of vignettes describing Gilda's exploits across the world, from competing in badminton tournaments to spending years in a Russian abbey painting a single apple seed the whole time to becoming a prisoner-of-war in Vietnam and befriending the rats that infest her cell (hence the title of Peck's book). As a whole, Kat creates a character study that attempts to reconsider Gilda's fame and legacy as a once world-renown author, who reached heights that no other Mormon writer has before. Over several decades, many Western and Eastern fans and academics attempted to interpret her unusual prose and philosophical meanderings like an entire ecological study dedicated to the contents of a junk drawer, but Kat attempts to shift the discussion toward who Gilda actually was in hopes of reviving the reputation of "this astonishing woman . . . whose name and work deserve to come out of obscurity," particularly among the faithful.

The entire book can be read as meta-commentary on the state of Mormon literature and whether or not it will ever reach its full potential. It's a question aspiring LDS authors have been asking themselves for more than a century since Orson F. Whitney predicted that we would someday have "Shakespeares and Miltons of our own." No one of that caliber has emerged yet, not even Gilda. The most successful Mormon authors of recent years like Orson Scott Card, Stephenie Meyer, and Brandon Sanderson have written mostly genre fiction, usually science fiction and fantasy, that rarely address anything to do with Mormonism (among the few exceptions are memoirs like Terry Tempest Williams' *Refuge*). Despite their successes, critics like Michael Austin believe that they have not "penetrated very far into the larger Mormon culture, much less the larger American literary culture, in a way that makes them comparable to the kinds of works" found among canonized authors like Shakespeare or Milton.¹⁰ Any of their ties to the faith come in the form

10. "Scholar to Scholar: On Mormon Literary Studies: A Conversation between Michael Austin and Scott Hales," *The Neal A. Maxwell*

of mere references to it that remain in the background or generic themes of mortality and immortality that their religious upbringing may have helped inform but can be found in almost any work of fiction stemming from the Judeo-Christian tradition. Fictional accounts primarily about the Mormon experience that have been successful among non-Mormons have largely come in the form of theater, film, or television, like HBO's *Big Love* or Broadway's *The Book of Mormon Musical*, and they either focus on extreme aspects of the religion or outright satirize it. In a sense, however, some contemporary Mormon authors have embraced some of these absurdities but with an insider's sincerity. According to Scott Hales, they have chosen to embrace "an approach that perceives the whole of the Mormon cosmology as a kind of playground where one can tell offbeat and fanciful stories that revel in the chaotic now of an information-age Mormonism."¹¹

This is Peck's approach to a tee, mainly by including Gilda's musings on the theological mysteries that church correlation unfortunately leaves unanswered. In one episode during a long stint outside of the church and her travels through South America, she takes hallucinatory drugs, contemplates the origin of God(s), hears the original Adamic language that Joseph Smith could only allude to, and follows various anthropomorphic guides (including Charles Darwin appropriately embodied as a beetle and a tortoise) through the spirit world in the hereafter, back to "the universe and its birth in a fiery flash," and well beyond to eternity's most conceivable beginning. There she finds the foundation "from which all Being sprang," where even gods evolved from matter, took new form, and gained consciousness over untold eons. The book's primary strength lies here in these deeper consid-

Institute for Religious Scholarship (blog), Dec. 15, 2014, <https://mi.byu.edu/scholar-to-scholar-on-mormon-literary-studies/>.

11. Scott Hales, "Review of Steven L. Peck, *The Scholar of Moab and A Short Stay in Hell*," *Mormon Studies Review* 2, no. 1 (2015): 180.

erations of Mormon theology and even everyday exercises in faithful worship, which are only made possible through the surreal adventures of a character like Gilda Trillim. This may be the product of Peck's training as an evolutionary biologist; I like to think that he begins each book with a hypothesis and treats each one as an experiment, with Gilda being his latest subject. No other Mormon writer would dare go as far as either of them do.

With that said, her story is inhibited by Peck's choice to present it through a secondary narrator's thesis. It causes the book to fall short both as a dissertation and as a fictional account. Other than the fact that Kat's thesis would never work in any grad school literature program because it's merely a depository of someone else's writing, most of the story feels more like exposition than anything. It also doesn't seem necessary for any other reason than to play with genre. Although it's an intriguing idea in theory, I don't think it pans out as well as one would have liked. For one thing, there's hardly any dialogue or interactions with other characters in the book because we hardly experience things as Gilda experiences them. Instead, she'll narrate them to another reader or a recipient of her letters. This puts her at a strange distance from us as an audience and turns her into a less intriguing enigma. Perhaps as a result, I became bored with Gilda's exploits after a while and was often tempted to skip ahead to more interesting sounding sections. This also made it harder for me to accept, let alone believe, most of her quirks as a character, especially when she spends too much time investigating more irrelevant topics like Emily Dickinson's cookbook. Finally, it makes much of what comes before and after the primary story about Gilda becoming a POW feel more like filler. The focus should have been here more than anywhere else with more connections leading up or back to it to give us a greater sense of her struggles other than those involving her LDS identity.

There's no doubt that Peck's latest work is creative and unusual as far as Mormon fiction goes. He has championed many unorthodox LDS protagonists, Gilda only being the latest entry. That said, due to the fragmented structure and framing of this book, many readers may find it less

accessible or engaging than his previous novels, especially if they're not as captivated with this heroine as he hopes that they'll be. Even then, it's hard to know who this book is actually for. Casual readers may find the character's eccentricities off-putting. Non-LDS audiences will only be confused by all the theological references to Mormon doctrine. Traditional Mormons may be offended by its occasional instances of profanity/violence or explicit discussions of taboo topics like Heavenly Mother. And for former Mormons, a lot of the philosophical tangents on the deeper intricacies of Mormon doctrine will only ring hollow. Those who are interested in the evolution of Mormon literature may be more willing to examine this piece for academic purposes, though it is up to them whether or not it succeeded—and of course, that is a limited readership.

I think what many hopeful LDS writers and readers fail to understand is that Mormon literature may always be a very niche market because the Mormon experience is often too obscure to outsiders who find it unappealing unless it involves the Church's more troubling history and unusual beliefs or practices that are, quite honestly, stranger than fiction. And those who do write fiction about Mormonism often have no choice but to emphasize intense inner-conflicts about each member's true devotion or stretch the realities of the day-to-day faith to absurd extremes (as Peck does in his book) since the daily lives of practicing Mormons are too often filled with musings or epiphanies that Gentile readers will find pedantic, whether that be through the sharing of testimonies or scripture study, and actions that they'll only find tedious like the endless hours of church meetings. It's a religion that is difficult to translate into fiction because its realities are polarizing and perplexing.

With that said, Peck remains one of the foremost author of this tradition because he avoids the pedestrian and embraces these perplexities by toying with them as gleefully as a novice scientist in a new laboratory. At times, that experimentation is just as enjoyable and enlightening for readers to witness unfold on the page. So even if he is not the one to fulfill Whitney's prophecy, Peck deserves credit for the ways he turns it on its head.



Tyler Swain
Portrait 3, Green Apple

Editor's Note

The following art essay consists of two pieces: a series of photos, and a personal narrative. The two work in tandem to deal with a difficult topic: the trauma of rape. Due to the sensitive and triggering nature of this topic, we want to reaffirm Dialogue's unequivocal condemnation of sexual assault. The following work represents an individual's aesthetic response, and we appreciate her willingness to share her work on this difficult topic with our audience so that we may practice seeing and listening together.

Trigger Warning: sexual assault, rape

Artist's Statement

After a lot of therapy and time, I assumed I would be fully healed. I wasn't. I began to notice patterns, albeit a little unsettling, as I took photos all over the world. I began to notice that I am drawn to churches of any shape and size, especially abandoned ones; to graffiti, chiefly depicting strong, unexpected images like images of powerful women; and finally that I am simply drawn to quirky juxtapositions, such as a woman's face sculpted into an English Garden, or two eyes drawn with a Sharpie used to make a face on a broken wall. What I began to observe is that my pain was reflecting itself through those images, and that somehow through those images, my narrative readjusted. As a result I began to heal. Instead of feeling hopeless or weak, I started to accept that being raped does not have to define me. It is simply a part of who I am. So, instead of turning away, or putting down my camera, when I saw an uncomfortable image, I embraced this unorthodox healing process. Ultimately these images reveal that there is always beauty, even when it seems broken, whether it is quirky, rugged, displaced, or strong. Instead of seeing an abandoned and vandalized building, I see strength and power reflected in a woman's face painted on exposed desert wall.

—Beth Adams





















a time to believe abuse victims

“I was raped by two men.”

It was only after many months of denial that I was able to utter those words. Even after facing the fact, the circumstances surrounding my assault were so muddy and bizarre that to this day it troubles me to consider them. Ultimately I decided to share my story because I am the mother of two amazing sons. Because one situation can enlighten the next, my particular parenting perspective is informed by my own experience. I am trying to break the cycle of secret-keeping and shame. My story is one of millions. It is a reflection. It is a template.

A constant theme in my early life was that of men who had an obligation to protect me and to respect me, instead committing numerous small acts of petty domination, verbal threatening, and entitled abuses of authority. In general, I did not see their behavior as an abuse of power. Instead, I often saw fault in myself. In my home, in school, and at church I was taught to submit to the authority of the men in my life.

Right now we are having a national conversation about sexual assault, and are raising awareness about how many victims continue to suffer in the aftermath because they are doubted, judged, and second-guessed. But there is another important point in this conversation, one that I want to emphasize here: most perpetrators of sexual assault do not start with violent rape. They start with acts of casual dominance.

The LDS Church’s standard of chastity would, presumably, act as a bulwark against sexual abuse among its members, but the publicity-sensitive Church has a history of secrecy in matters of sexual assault, and many members have felt pressured to allow their Church leaders to adjudicate these matters. Worse, victims, usually women, have often found themselves under the microscope in the aftermath. Faced with criticism, the Church has made some progress in recent years. Brigham Young University changed its policy toward victims of sexual assault in 2016:

[Brigham Young University's] Title IX staff will be charged with ensuring that information they receive from alleged victims will not be shared with the Honor Code Office without their consent. And students who report sexual assaults will no longer face having their conduct at the time questioned for possible Honor Code violations.¹

Unfortunately, while the LDS Church does unequivocally condemn sexual assault, its male-heavy power structure can condition both men and women to accept small acts of domination as normal. After I was raped, I went to my bishop. I honestly do not know why, except for the reality that I was taught that, as my judge in Israel, he had ultimate and eternal power over me. As such, I felt like his priesthood power would somehow make the pain go away. I felt guilty for drinking wine and wanted absolution. Ultimately, I was still in shock and not ready to talk about it, so I gave little detail about being raped. What I received were consequences for my own actions. Though the men who raped me were not members of the Church in good standing, they were raised in the LDS culture. One of the two men lived in the same BYU dorm building and at the same time as the man who later became my husband. The other was from Utah County and raised LDS. One of the more bizarre aspects of the event was the fact that at least one of the perpetrators had become so desensitized to forcing his will upon women that he utterly failed to see his actions as an assault and apparently even considered it to be a sort of courtship. I had been so conditioned to submitting myself to men that I found myself playing along. The culture we were raised in, both US and LDS, laid the groundwork for one of the most traumatic events in my life. It is only now, years later, that I have realized this.



1. Jessica Miller, "Honor Code Amnesty is Just One Part of BYU's 23 Steps for Addressing Sexual Assault," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, Oct. 26, 2016, <http://www.sltrib.com/news/education/2016/11/16/honor-code-amnesty-is-just-one-part-of-byus-23-steps-for-addressing-sexual-assault/>.

#MeToo

There I was,
at a party.
Someone was asking me a question.

"I never drink wine." I responded.
"Oh, you don't?" a stranger said.
The host continued, "This is Bob."

I looked up and said, "Hi Bob."

I was doing all the talking as another man lurched in the shadows of my words. Bob continued staring at me. It felt nice to be noticed. The host continued, "This is Matt. He works at the library."

I smiled. Matt looked too mainstream in this room filled with overly-self-actualized hipsters. In contrast to my observation, Matt was comfortable (or was at least posing) as he rambled philosophically about growing up in Utah. He wanted to make sure we all knew that he was now a disenfranchised Mormon. Matt argued that he was misled by the Mormon "cult," and that is why he found Mormonism so anthropologically wrong. "Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah," I thought. Living in Utah for the last several years, I had become desensitized to this particular narrative, a narrative that often served as a party icebreaker. Usually I would hear it with an open heart again. That night I wanted to talk about something else.

Eventually Matt stopped. The night continued and people began trickling out.

As the hours passed, the conversation moved from awkwardness to elation. Excitedly I proclaimed,

"I don't usually drink wine. It gives me a migraine."

What I wanted to say was that I did not want to drink anymore, yet felt out of place setting my half empty glass down. Likewise, I did not have the courage to add the part about how I also felt really guilty drinking alcohol. Regardless of my internal struggle, someone encouraged me to finish. And as they lit up a joint, I noticed that same person take the glass out of my clumsy hand. I am not sure I finished, yet soon I was drifting in and out of consciousness. It seems, in retrospect, very unusual that one glass of wine would have had that effect.

I woke to Bob sitting down beside me. I was absolutely captivated by his eyes. They seemed kind and made the rest of him appear very attractive. Matt was sitting close by, complaining. The more he spoke, the more irritating his words became.

As the conversation continued, I bobbed and weaved in and out of a dream-like wakefulness. Bob began to rub my leg. Even though I saw it there, I was not connecting that his hand was literally touching my thigh. Instead, I noticed how electric his touch felt. Because I felt like I was watching from above, all these sensations seemed crazy and disconnected. (I know. It does not make sense to me either.) By this point, Bob was kissing my neck. Matt was sitting closer, eagerly watching. I struggled to keep my eyes open. My shirt was off. I felt cold. I could not say the words,

“I am cold.”

Now exposed, I saw Matt hold up a condom.

“I’ve never done this before,” I heard Matt tell Bob.

Next I heard the wrapper. I saw him pull the condom out. I tried to say, “No. No. No.” My words seemed lost in my sleepy delirium. (I guess I should be grateful that he put on the condom, right?) By now Bob was sucking hard on my neck, holding me down forcefully. I am small in stature. Fighting one of these men would be difficult. Fighting two would be impossible, especially in my impaired state. I could not move. I could only close my eyes. I held my breath. I felt it. I felt Bob’s

strength. I felt Matt at the same time. Then Matt jammed his large condom-covered penis inside of me. It hurt. I felt weightless.

“Asshole.” I softly uttered. Still quiet, I pleaded, “No! No! No!”

They did not hear me, and if they did, they did not stop. I passed out again. I know at some moment someone else was in the room. I always wondered why they did nothing. My guess is they did nothing because I was not loud, or maybe they told themselves that I was having a good time. I was not having a good time. Matt was raping me. Now Bob was raping me. Then there was a penis in my mouth. They continued to overpower me. I do not know if it was complete and utter fear, but something kept me from moving.

“I should scream,” I thought.

I could not.



I woke the next morning next to a discarded condom. Matt was still sleeping close by. My head was pounding. Bob was gone. My new white shirt was next to Matt. It was completely stained red and covered in dirt. Then I notice that the back of my hair was snarled. (It was snarled so much that later that day I had to cut chunks of hair off.) In an eerie haze, I got up. The hosts had cats. I am so allergic to cats, my eyes were practically swollen shut and blistered from rubbing them so vigorously.

I picked up my dirty and stained new shirt. I walked downstairs still holding it. I found a trash can, wadded up my shirt, and threw it away (placing it under other trash so no one would see it). Then I looked around to find Bob in his room. He held out his arms. I walked inside. He motioned to his bed. I lay down beside him.

“My wife is on a whirlwind trip. She comes home in a week,” he said as he started to kiss me and touch me. I froze. In my head I could not compute what I was hearing.

“You have a wife?” I said in confusion.

“We have an open relationship,” he said and continued, “She likes to watch me with other women.”

My confusion was replaced with fear. I wanted to leave. I felt disgusted with myself. We continued to kiss. For what seemed like a long time, he held my trembling body. I realized that I needed to be at work. I asked him to borrow a shirt. I got up, looked out the window and noticed that my car was gone. In my head, I was freaking out. Outwardly I was still in a relaxed, PTSD-haze.

“I will be late to work. My car is gone. My keys are gone.” I said. Feeling ashamed, I left Bob’s room.



Since then I have learned that people react to trauma and fear in every way you can imagine. My therapist suggests that I probably reached out to the safer of the two men, and that I was trying to normalize the terrible thing that had just happened. I appreciate my therapist’s compassion, but it still seems crazy and wrong.



Now out of Bob’s room, I frantically tried to reach the person who took my car. There was no answer. That is when I found myself sitting on the stairs by the entryway. I called work, nervous. It is a new job and know that I am already late.

“I will be late this morning is that ok?” I asked.

“Beth, if you can not get to work on time, do not come in at all,” she urged.

“Please understand. Someone took my car,” I pleaded.

“That is not our problem,” she tersely said and hung up.

It occurred to me that I needed to get out of there. I need a ride. I could have called a cab or even another friend. Instead I called my mom.

“Will you come and pick me up?” I asked.

“Where are you?” she replied.

I told her where I was, which was actually a block over from where I actually stood. Now on a random street, I found myself standing far away from where these people would see my mom, and where my mom would see them. My hair was still a crazy mess. My eyes were still mostly swollen shut. I was wearing a stranger’s t-shirt, a shirt I would also throw away. My mom pulled up. I got into her car. Lovingly (because I think she may have actually been terrified) my mom acted as if nothing was out of place. I shut the door, put on my seatbelt, and she drove.

It was at her apartment when she noticed how bad my eyes were. She asked if I had been around cats.

“Here. Take this. It will help with your allergies,” she said.

She left.

“Why isn’t she staying?” I wondered, “Can’t she see I am in pain?” Then I thought, “Well, if she left it must not be that bad.”



Even though I told myself it was not that bad, I was afraid to be alone. I was also too afraid to ask her not to leave. A few hours later, after the swelling in my eyes went down, I tried to assess what had happened. As I looked at this person in the mirror and stood stunned, I saw the image of a woman in horrible pain. Her hair was so tangled she had to cut chunks of it out. Her bruises were so thick and purple around her neck that she looked as if she had survived a botched strangulation attempt. You could see finger marks in her bruises. In shock, I saw the outline. I wanted to hug her. I wanted to tell her it would be ok. Her eyes were so raw that I knew it was more than just the cats. I started to cry. It seemed like forever that I stood there staring. Finally, after a lot of looking away, I was able to see that the woman I was staring at was me.

In that moment I was able to intellectualize that in the past twenty-four hours I had been abandoned at a party. My car was stolen. I was fired and I was brutally raped by two men. And as quickly as I put those pieces together, I hid my secret far away. I became stoic and filled with quiet fury.

And for the next several months I was disconnected. I was embarrassed. I was ashamed, and mostly, I was confused. It took all of those extremely rage-filled months before I could utter the words. What actually pushed the words back to the surface was a moment of extreme stress. The trigger was my familiar but horrible eye-swelling cat allergies. An empathetic roommate of mine and I were visiting a friend in Kansas. One night at bedtime, when I was about to itch my eyes right out of my head, I blurted out the words:

“I was raped by two men.”

Months later, because I was tired of always being so completely angry, I finally made it back to my trusted therapist. I uttered those words again:

“I was raped by two men.”

I paused as the guilt settled in. Sheepishly, I continued. “Not only do I think I was raped, but I kissed one of the men the next morning.” Then I looked at my therapist to make sure he was ok with what I was telling him. I took a breath and said, “Not only that, the man I kissed is married.”

I waited for my therapist to scold me. Instead I saw tears.

“Oh Beth. I am so sorry.”

He urged me to call the police. I told him I was not sure I could.

At that he quickly got up and raced to get out a legal book. He pointed out the definition of “gang rape” and read it to me. He copied the pages so I could process. As he handed me the pages he said,

“Not only were you raped, but you were gang raped. Not only were you raped by two men, but you were abandoned by your friends.”



In spite of all the years of family dysfunction and abuse that I dealt with and conquered, I could not wrap my head around what happened that night. And it happened to me. I still did not want to go to the police. I absolutely did not want to embarrass my family or draw attention to myself. I just wanted it to go away.

For many years, I have screamed from inside a deep place. No one could hear my screams. I know others were screaming too. Ultimately within our LDS culture, systematic abuse of power is a process, and it is built upon over years, even generations. Within that process I was taught, I assumed things were my fault. The fact that I drank wine that night somehow exempted my rapists. This logic makes no sense except within the system I was taught. And if abuse of power is a process, when we teach our children our patriarchal process, are we also responsible? In the end, breaking the cycle is why I speak up today. I do think things are changing. People are believing victims and victims are being heard. We scream differently. My screams join the other screams. Those once-silenced screams are becoming conversations. And conversations are happening because no one, absolutely no one, should have to go through this, especially not alone.

ELOUISE BELL (1935–2017)

Michael Fillerup

In the fall of 1973, I enrolled as a sophomore at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. On a whim, I registered for a course titled ENG 240 WRITING POETRY, INSTRUCTOR: E. BELL. I had no idea who “E. Bell” was—male or female? animal, vegetable, or mineral?—but I soon found out. The first day of class, as we eager, would-be-poets settled into our neatly aligned desk-chairs, the door opened and a statuesque woman with the regal swagger of a Hawaiian queen and the deadpan grin of a stand-up comic entered the classroom toting a hefty book bag that she promptly dropped on the teacher’s desk—clunk! With an audible exhalation, she sat down and eyed us like a disgruntled basketball coach sizing up her ragtag recruits. She briefly rummaged through her bag, removed a book, cracked it open, and proceeded to read a poem. I don’t remember the name of the poem or its author, but I vividly recall the manner in which “E. Bell” read it: full-throttle, varying the voices of the multiple narrators, at one point howling like a coyote, at another lowering her voice until it was barely audible, then blasting a hole through the wall with it. Her face twisted, contorted, smiled, frowned. In two short minutes, she displayed the Three Faces of Eve and the Seven Faces of Dr. Lao. She wasn’t just reading—she was performing. She was putting on a show, and the walls of our classroom seemed to close in upon us, and the world outside withdrew as we became her captive little audience in a fire-lit Paleolithic cave where the power of words—not flashing screens or monitors—was our sole source of entertainment.

At that moment I remember thinking to myself: “What the hell have I gotten myself into?”

I soon found out. Elouise Bell's class would be the most exhilarating and enlightening experience of my college career. Every class session we would take our seats and wait in silent anticipation wondering, "What's she going to do today? What magic trick is she going to pull out of that book bag?"

Periodically, she would enthrall us with her histrionic readings, but the title of the course was WRITING POETRY, so for the lion's share of the class we read our well-intentioned work while receiving constructive feedback from our peers and, most importantly, from our venerable if somewhat eccentric instructor. I can still see Elouise sitting at her desk listening as we read our work, periodically nodding (a good sign) or her lower lip twisting and her forehead buckling (a bad sign), every so often smiling (very good), and very, very rarely, whispering as if to herself: "nice . . . very nice." And if she tagged our name onto the whisper (as in, "very nice, Joan" or "very nice, David"), we knew we had scored a winner. Although she always found something positive in our efforts, Elouise did not dish out praise perfunctorily. You had to earn your little gold stars. In retrospect, it was remarkable how much sway her opinions had over my young heart. If I got a "very nice, Michael," I would be flying high for a week. On the other hand, I remember how on one of my more experimental pieces she scribbled one word: "UGH!" I was devastated. I couldn't sleep for a month.

Back then, Brigham Young University had—and still maintains—a strict code of conduct that includes explicit dress and grooming standards. During those first few weeks of class, I had allowed my sun-bleached locks to creep down over my ears and past my collar—a strictly verboten length. Either a fellow student had ratted me out or I was the victim of a random sighting by the BYU Dress and Grooming Police. In any case, for some reason, Elouise was notified that I was in violation of the Honor Code, and what was she going to do about it? (Elouise never did understand why she had been assigned to call me on the carpet.) She didn't summon me into her office for a finger-shaking

lecture about integrity and honoring covenants and how hair over my collar was the first step towards a swift descent to Hell. Rather, in classic Elouise Bell fashion, at the end of the next class, she called me up to her desk, handed me a sealed envelope, smiled, and said four words: “Oh, Michael, Michael, Michael . . .”

I played nonchalant at first, thanking her for the letter as I strolled out into the autumn sunlight. But the instant I was out of eyesight and earshot, I ripped open the envelope, fully expecting to see my expulsion papers. Instead, I found a poem, an Elouise Bell original, two pages of clever, dancing, prancing words that read like a lilting manifesto that could also have been the lyrics to a song on the Beatles’ *White Album*. The gist of the message was: if you want to stay in school—and I hope you do—please choose the clippers over the ruby slippers.

I found a cheap barbershop that afternoon.

After I graduated from BYU, Elouise and I stayed in touch. I kept her posted about my whereabouts, the births of my children, and other mileposts as I hacked my way through the jungles of adult life. I often sent her drafts of short stories that she would return a few weeks later with a little smiley face at the top of page one and red ink hemorrhaging liberally over all the pages that followed. But I had learned to love the sight of her second-hand blood. No one could drill to the heart of a literary work—poem, short story, novel, play—quite like Elouise. Whether it was a Shakespearean masterpiece or a pedestrian effort by a callow undergraduate, she always knew exactly what worked, what didn’t, and why, and she would boldly and blatantly tell you so.

If I was fortunate enough to publish a story or win a contest, Elouise would always send me a congratulatory card. I remember one in particular featured a little red devil wielding a pitchfork with the caption: HOT DAMN AND HALLELUJAH! But other times she sent cards randomly, as if she intuitively knew when I was struggling through a rough patch. Most were humorous, but others were more thought-provoking. All were perfectly timed to rescue me from whatever demons had grabbed

me by the throat at the moment. I pinned those cards to the bulletin board above my desk until they covered the better part of it, and, over the years, a quick glance at that eclectic collage would always conjure up a smile, even on those days when I felt far more like the receiving end of a battering ram than a covenant child of God.

I think it's no understatement to call Elouise the grande dame of Mormon letters. We lost her on September 30, 2017. She will be remembered for oh so many things. She was an award-winning columnist for *network* and *The Salt Lake Tribune* and a gifted writer who published poems, stories, and two collections of humorous essays—*Only When I Laugh* (1990) and *Madame Ridiculous and Lady Sublime* (2001). She also wrote and performed a one-woman play, *Aunt Patty Remembers*, based upon the life of Mormon pioneer mid-wife Patty Bartlett Sessions. She was an entertaining public speaker, a civic leader, and a founding member of the Association of Mormon Letters (1976). She was a lover of animals who, in her words, “had to be vigorously restrained from acting on her belief that she could housetrain llamas.”¹

And she was a pioneer for her era. A staunch advocate for women's rights and equality, on September 30, 1975 she became the first female faculty member at BYU to deliver a forum address, and it was a groundbreaking doozy. “The Implications of Feminism for BYU” became a clarion call for all Latter-day Saints, male and female, to embrace the women's movement as a sacred opportunity to right the historical and societal wrongs against women. And that was just her warm-up act. In 1983, in recognition for her contributions to human rights and the cause of women, the Utah Political Caucus honored Elouise with the Susa Young Gates Award. Fourteen years later, the Governor of Utah presented her with the Utah Woman of Achievement Award in recognition of a lifetime of contribution and service to the cause of women and families.

1. Elouise Bell, “Obituary for Elouise M. Bell.” Unpublished, 2017.

Astoundingly, as she neared the end of her time on earth, Elouise lamented the fact that she hadn't been more vocal about women's rights. I reminded her of her tenuous position for her generation: an unmarried female professor at one of the most patriarchal educational institutions in the nation. If she had been more brash and outspoken, at best she would have been dismissed as a contentious feminist crackpot, an apostate, "one of them"; at worst, she could have been fired. So she had resorted to a far more subversive and effective weapon: humor. Early in life she had learned that she could say just about anything and get away with it as long as she couched it in a good one-liner. So she became the court jester of sorts, the grand humorist who could pull back the curtain on the blushing Wizard or tell the pompous Emperor, "Oh, and by the way, you're buck naked, brother"—without fear of retribution or termination.

After retiring from BYU in 1994, Elouise found herself at another crossroads when she met the love of her life, Nancy R. Jefferis, a senior partner in a law firm in South Carolina. Once again, she took the road less traveled, following her heart, and in 2015 she broke yet another barrier when she married Nancy in the Universalist Church in Edmund, Oklahoma.

Writer, poet, humorist, world-class essayist, thespian, activist, pioneer: Elouise was all of these and more, but first and foremost, she was a teacher. She was born to teach, and she knew it. She once told me that, after graduating from college, she was offered a job as a journalist at a prestigious magazine in New York. "I could have been good," she said, "damn good! Barbara Walters good!" She signed the contract, sealed the envelope, stuck it in her mailbox, and raised the little red flag. Then she walked back inside, sat down, folded her arms, and thought a moment. There was this job offer that had been nibbling at the back of her brain. They needed an English teacher at Brigham Young University. Why was this thought still nibbling so earnestly? She got up, sauntered out to the mailbox, retrieved the envelope, tore it up, and a few days later she was on her way to Provo.

I once asked Elouise if she ever regretted that decision. She shook her head vigorously, then explained why. The first day when she stood in front of her first class, she felt an adrenal rush of sheer euphoria, like an actor when the lights come up on opening night. And she thought to herself: *This is what I want to do for the rest of my life.*

And so she did—at least for the next thirty-five years of it. And I and the myriad other students who were fortunate enough to occupy a seat in one of her classrooms were forever blessed because of it. She taught us far more than how to string together coherent sentences. She taught us honesty and authenticity. She taught us to write what we actually felt, not what some individual or institution told us we were supposed to feel. She helped us find our unique voice and then gave us the courage to articulate it. Elouise never had children of her own, yet she had thousands—surrogate sons and daughters like me whose lives were literally transformed in her classroom. Because of Elouise, we saw the world differently and we saw ourselves differently. We saw grace and goodness in the ordinary, and injustice and hypocrisy in established norms. We saw strength and beauty in diversity, and the power and glory of words.

Thus, she taught us—generations of us—to look a little more deeply at life, love, politics, and religion; to question societal and cultural traditions that had been passed down as gospel truth. Instead of burning her bra, she made jokes. She made us laugh. And after we had finished laughing, an hour later and five miles down the road, when it hit us like a delayed double-take, she made us think. And then things got really interesting. In time we conceived our own impossible dreams and charged Quixote-like into the breach: hot damn and hallelujah!

As her students, she saw us through a mother's eyes, which is to say through God's eyes: not as dust-of-the-earth misfits blundering through mortality but as angels of light divinely commissioned to save the world in our own unique way. We seldom lived up to the billing, but any good thing that I have done in my adult life has Elouise's fingerprints on it.

And whenever my head droops or my courage falters, I hear her voice above the din cheering me on: the clouds part, I press on, and in time I'm standing on the summit with her arm around my shoulder, a kiss on my cheek, and a funky congratulatory card in my hand.

Elouise was bigger than life, a one-of-a-kind who will never be duplicated. I'm tempted to say that a shining light on the hill has forever been extinguished, but that's not true. Elouise has simply taken her well-earned place among the stars. In one of her essays titled "Still Teaching?" Elouise made this observation:

When people move beyond school years, they think of themselves as advancing down a time-line. But memory claims those years we move beyond, including the people involved. Teachers are part of the furniture of those chambers of memory. Though rationally we know otherwise, emotionally we believe they have never changed position on that time-line. So meeting a former teacher is like re-entering our own past. As long as Mrs Booker is still teaching English, as long as Professor Gasbag still lectures on chemistry, our past is intact, just as we remember it. We have stepped into a holodeck of our own creation. And next time we return, it will still be there. Won't it?²

In Elouise's case, the answer is a resounding yes, because her light, her spirit, continues to radiate through her many friends and former students, and through our children and our grandchildren down through the generations.

At the funeral of feminist activist Algie E. Ballif, Elouise remarked to a stranger, "She was the great role model of my life."

"Ah," the other woman said. "Then you haven't really lost her."³

Nor have we lost Elouise.

2. Elouise Bell, "Still Teaching?" *Madame Ridiculous and Lady Sublime* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books 2001), 72.

3. Elouise Bell, "In Memoriam: Algie E. Ballif," *Only When I Laugh* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books 1990), 36.

DOUGLAS HEAL THAYER (1929–2017)

Margaret Blair Young

*“Margaret, are you grieving
Over Golden grove unleaving?”*

This is how Douglas Thayer often greeted me when we met in the hallway of the Jesse Knight Building, where both of us taught for years. I wonder if I was the only person who got such a greeting from his rich supply of poems. I was still in my twenties, newly married to Bruce Young, when he first greeted me this way—in 1985. I had taken advanced creative writing from him in 1978, but I’m not sure he remembered that.

I certainly remember it, though. I was deeply intimidated by him. I had already started my third-world adventures, and had taken only two books with me to Guatemala the previous summer: *Moby Dick* and *Under the Cottonwoods*—Doug’s first short story collection, his personal response to President Kimball’s plea for LDS art and literature that could rival the great works of the world. I had recognized Dr. Thayer’s talent, and found “The Clinic” in that collection to be one of the finest pieces I had read anywhere. It’s the story of a returned missionary/Viet Nam war veteran who has gone from hope in the gospel to horrors in the jungle, and who visits “the clinic” as part of his recovery. The other stories in the collection were excellent as well, but “The Clinic” (which he would eventually expand into a novel titled *The Tree House*) moved me the way only great literature can. Surely, this man had one of the finest minds and most expansive hearts in the literary world.

I would find out later that I was right in my assumptions about his mind and his heart, but the man I encountered in English 518 was

sardonic, witty, and sometimes painfully direct. He would not tolerate the term “making love,” for example, if the characters doing it were not married. No, if they weren’t married, sex was fornication.

His gifts of charity were cloaked in his ironic responses to people and words. He was funny and he was normal. I would not have guessed just by seeing him that he had the depth of intellect and heart to write “The Clinic.” Indeed, his “common man” bearing was part of his charm.

I remember him asking us students, “Does anyone have a copy of ‘La Belle Dame Sans Merci’?”

I immediately opened my purse and started looking.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“I’m checking to see if I have that poem.”

Douglas Thayer then gave me THE look. The Look that only those of us lucky enough to have received it can picture. It cannot happen on any face but Doug’s. The look lasts a full three seconds.

“You’re all English majors,” he said as The Look ended. “I thought one of you might have an anthology with the poem in it.” His lips fought an amused smile. He muttered something and shook his head. “Looking in your purse!”

Doug was my supervisor when I started teaching Freshman English in 1985, and he was aware that I was dating my former professor. Bruce Young and I announced our engagement just before the English Department awards banquet in March 1985. I had won an award for a short story, so it was a big night—and the English professors were thrilled that Bruce, age thirty-four, was going to marry.

After the banquet, Doug congratulated me. I assumed that his kind words referred to my engagement. “You already knew, right?” I said. “Well, of course I knew,” Doug answered (emphasizing KNEW in his inimitable way). “I made the list!”

Now it was my turn to give Doug a significant look—but mine was confused. “The list?”

“Oh!” he said. “Oh! You’re referring to something else, not your award! Are there wedding bells?”

Of course, the idea of an “older” professor in BYU’s English Department getting married was quintessentially Doug and Donlu’s. Theirs was the romance of the English Department century. She was twenty-six and he was forty-five when they married in 1974—after a four-year courtship, and long past the time when anyone thought that Professor Thayer would marry.

As Doug transitioned from being “Dr. Thayer” to Doug in my world, I found him wry and joyful, easily cajoled into wonderful, full-bodied laughter.

When I next saw him in the hall, after my marriage, he greeted me with Gerard Manley Hopkins’s lines for the first time: “Margaret are you grieving? Do you know that poem, Margaret?”

I said that I did know it, but not well. His quoting it so often to me made me want to read it more deeply.

In 1989, Doug’s short story collection, *Mr. Wahlquist in Yellowstone*, was published. I eagerly recommended it to my students, particularly the story “The Red-Tailed Hawk,” which Gene England had called “the perfect story.” (Only six years ago, Doug published yet another acclaimed collection, *Wasatch: Mormon Stories and a Novella*.)

And so, Doug Thayer and I became colleagues, and I remained his fan. He knew it, and thanked me periodically for recommending his work to my classes. When he published his memoir about growing up in Provo (*Hooligan: A Mormon Boyhood*) I recommended it to my family as well as to my students. I believe that my aunt Helen Dahlquist bought fifty copies. It was so familiar and true to her, as she had also been raised in Provo. And it was hilarious!

His stories and novels (the novels include *Summer Fire* and *The Conversion of Jeff Williams* as well as *The Tree House*) were full of his dry wit and keen observations of human nature, and some were very hard. His story, “Wolves!” which was recently anthologized in *Dispensation* (edited by Angela Hallstrom) depicted rape and slow recovery. It is a violent and disturbing story, and author Neal Chandler told me he thought it was the best thing Doug had yet written.

And there's the essence of Doug's writing life: he was still writing. He was always becoming a better writer.

The other parts of his life were also about growth and evolution, including the evolution of faith. When the mother of our colleague, Bruce Jorgensen, was in a care center, Doug began quietly visiting and comforting her. He and my husband gave her a blessing. This is one of many examples, most of which I only imagine, of Doug's unheralded charity. It was a part of how Doug lived his life. He simply did good. No fanfare.

He enjoyed teaching his children the value of hard work, and insisted that lawn mowing include careful edging. (His sons had a lawn mowing business.) He loved them and was proud of them.

He loved Donlu. No fanfare.

I have some of my own stories in anthologies that feature Doug's work as well. What's not written is what I write now: without Douglas Heal Thayer, many of us Mormon writers would have lacked the mentoring we needed at the time when we needed it. Our stories might not have been written had Doug Thayer not written his. He was a teacher and an exemplar—beyond the classroom, and beyond the written text. He has been called (with Don Marshall) the vanguard of the “second generation” of LDS literature, coming after the “lost generation.” We who are now in our fifties and sixties were just coming of age when Doug taught us what a good “coming of age” story is. Many of us have gone on not only to write, but to teach. Whatever bit of light we have passed on to our students came, in part, from Douglas Thayer. The reflections of his bright star on the pages of Mormon literary history will go on forever. Those of us who knew him were blessed by this legacy, which we gratefully pass on.

Of course, I must finish with that line which I can imagine Angel Doug asking me at his funeral service: “Margaret, are you grieving?”

Oh yes. Yes, yes.



Tyler Swain
Portrait 4, Pumpkin

I'VE GOT A FEELING

Megan Conley

My dad gave me Hugh Nibley while I was in high school. His writing seemed to be a place set for me at the table of Mormonism. I dug into Nibley's work and quoted my findings in seminary, in church, in the middle of lunch at school. (I didn't have very many friends.) Hugh Nibley was delightful to me because he was so much more like the conversations I had at home than many of the lessons I was taught during Sunday school.

An institute teacher gave me *Dialogue* in college. I experienced the same thrill I'd felt the first time I'd sat down to read Nibley's *Temple and Cosmos*. I felt like I belonged. It wasn't that I agreed with everything Nibley wrote, or every essay I read in *Dialogue*. (Unless of course, it was one that you wrote. In which case: Agree. Endorse. Will read again.) It was something so much bigger than finding people with the same world view. Rather, I felt sustained by the endeavor I found both Nibley and *Dialogue* engaged in—fingernails dirty from digging in the loam, seeds planted and ideas raised up to the light. The fact that some ideas never bore fruit seemed secondary to me.

So, being asked to speak at Dialogue Symposium was very much a sort of full circle thrill.

I imagine most of the things presented here today will be well cited, thoroughly researched, peer-reviewed, and life's work supported.

I haven't got any of that.

In fact, once I realized that committing to talk here meant I actually I had to talk here, my first question was, "Wait. What have I got?"

I emailed an academic friend of mine.

"What should I talk about?"

His response was six paragraphs long. I had to Wikipedia twelve of the names and three philosophies he mentioned.

Which seems like a talk in itself, right?

What does it mean to be a thinking woman in the Mormon community when you don't have letters before or after your name? When you don't have the time or inclination to devote hours of your day to research and writing. When you can't find community with the intellectuals because you can't quote, well, one of those names I had to Wikipedia. And you can't find community with the "traditional" Mormon woman because you're processing grey when she sees black and white and besides, you never really liked casserole anyways.

But then, that's kind of a gross simplification, isn't it? How many women do I know that see only light and dark? And when was the last time someone served me a casserole?

So maybe my talk was there! I could stand here as the Everyday Mormon Woman. The one that questions what she hears over the pulpit but stays in the Church. The one that puts on her garments and hopes for a better understanding someday. The one that agitates in her heart rather than the streets. The one that believes fiercely in much of it and is passionately disheartened by the rest. The kind of woman I meet in loud gatherings and across quiet emails almost every day.

But now that I mention it, that all sounds kind of radical. Maybe there is no "Everyday Mormon Woman." So maybe I talk about that. Maybe I talk about the kind of woman I am, how it feels to be a feminist in a patriarchal faith. But then that's complicated, too. I've been told by the People Who Know that I am not quite feminist enough to claim the title. And of course, I've been told by the *other* People Who Know that I am too feminist to claim many other titles. The fact that both groups of knowing people come from within my faith makes my head spin a little faster than it generally does on its own. I am currently too morning sick to deal with either group's gravitational pull.

So.

I don't have the research, I don't have the "Everyday," and as many will tell you, I don't have the right.

I've just got a feeling.

My head is where it usually is, stretching up until it cracks the top off of our house. Bricks crumble, plaster falls, and that old roof is just a hat with shingles. And I think, "Maybe that's all it ever was?" I wonder briefly if the roof on my head will still protect my children from the rain.

My neck continues pushing upward, until all I see is black and bright and all I breathe is stardust. When I look below me I can see what I knew and in the space that surrounds me I can feel what I don't know. (Here's the part where I want to make a pun about it being a heady experience, but I won't. You're welcome.)

I've got a feeling about the individual lights that carve my individual world out of the darkness.

I've got a feeling that theology matters because the questions we ask our sacred texts are nearly as important as the answers they give.

I've got a feeling that while the canon, and the documents that support it, may change over the years—while this may be par for the course—we've got a big problem if many of those changes work to put women in the place a narrative would have them rather than the place God would have them. We do not have to trust change that obscures truth or heritage.

I've got a feeling that I need women to plant their feet on the ashes of their hearthstones and declare themselves priestesses of their working temples, acolytes of our God.

I've got a feeling there are plenty dirtying their soles doing just that in the present, the past, and the future.

I've got a feeling that woman labors until we are each born of her in a flood of water and blood and Spirit. And I wonder, I wonder, I wonder how this is often lost as a sign and a token and an ordinance

and a covenant and a marker of She Who Is Holy and She Who Can Speak and We Who Should Listen.

I've got a feeling that my sisters—the women who gather round tables after children have gone to bed, the women who ask, “You, too?” on quiet car rides after long talks, the women who read and pray and study and nurture and ache and bleed and burn and balm—have really been prophetesses and priestesses all along.

I've got a feeling that when rights are lost, wrongs are embraced.

I've got a feeling about the things I think are inferior, the folklore of modern Mormonism I'm sure I've grown beyond. Hear me out. An example. Oils. Those oils—the ones that are tied up with MLMs, that lamentable scourge of Mormon culture. I know! And I know what most of my academic friends think of them, I've heard about it on Facebook threads and in conversation. The silly women who would cure illness with lavender. Between you and me, I don't really believe in all that stuff, either. (And this is all between us, isn't it?) At my worst, I've laughed too. And then, at my best, I've cried.

Do you remember, dear brothers and sisters? That there was a time when we women were instructed to heal with the Holy Anointing Oil? Has it occurred to none of us that maybe our sisters bathe their children with lavender because some ancestral memory moves their hands from child to oil and back to child again? That good things left behind will fallow? And that a religion that began by embracing folkways cannot purge them—or the women who would extract power from them—as easily as we all hoped? Why did we hope for that? What if we gave our sisters the Oil of Her Tree back? What healing would happen then?

I've got a feeling that I could be all wrong about all sorts of things, and that is all right.

I've got a feeling that I am safe with my God and safe with your God, too.

I've got a feeling that my Mormonism—my truth, my pull into the eternities, my push into the present—cannot, should not, be separated from yours. That we can do this together, that we must do this together,

that our dissonance makes a wild noise heavenly beings will tune until we match their celestial pitch.

I've got a feeling that we can decide there are some truths worth shattering over, or we can decide there are some comforts worth building upon.

I've got a feeling that I am not going to be ashamed of my feelings anymore. That I am going to say the things the Spirit gives me with the authority of a daughter created in the likeness of her Mother. That there is progression between the kingdoms and the Spirit is She and there is more to come and any one of us may receive it all.

I've got a feeling that there are many narratives but few truths and I get to choose the ones that bring me closest to the light.

I've got a feeling that I am going to plant my feet on the ashes of my hearthstone and raise my hands to God.

I've got a feeling that my birthright is my authority and my authority is my birthright.

I've got a feeling that maybe none of these feelings really matter. That the stardust will accumulate in my nostrils and the grass will grow up around my toes until I've forgotten about the blood that connects my head to my feet. I'll grow cold and still and quiet. And then. And then. Warmed by the fire I forgot I held in my hands, my heart will beat again. And I will finally know what I did not know.

I've got a feeling we are here to love and be loved and to forgive and be forgiven and from that truth all else will expand until there is enough space between the stars for every single one of us.

I've got a feeling.

And as odd as it may seem. *Dialogue*—with its intellectuals and academics and citations I never read—is one of the things that has given me the permission to stand here and feel that feeling is enough.

This talk was delivered at the Spirit of Dialogue conference, celebrating Dialogue's fiftieth anniversary, on September 30, 2016.



Tyler Swain
Portrait 5, Red Apple

CONTRIBUTORS

BETH ADAMS {beth@crazyus.com} studied English with a focus in Creative Writing at Brigham Young University. She began her career as an internet marketing manager. By the 2010s, she had moved on to travel writing, doing five to six international trips per year and long domestic road trips through America's National Parks. More recently, she's been studying the art of the memoir, and has put her efforts into delving for the truth of the human condition through her own life experiences.

GERALD S. ARGETSINGER {gsarget@aol.com} (Professor of Cultural and Creative Studies, Rochester Institute of Technology, retired) is the founder of the Gay Mormon Literature Project and lead editor of *Latter Gay Saints: An Anthology of Gay Mormon Fiction* (2014). He has published extensively on Scandinavian literature and scores of theatre topics. His plays are represented by Leicester Bay Theatricals. He served in the Presidency of the Hill Cumorah Pageant and was its Artistic Director 1990–97. Other callings include ward and stake Young Men's Presidencies, Stake High Council, and currently as ward Sunday School President. B.A. Brigham Young University, Ph.D. Bowling Green State University, Ohio. He is married to Gail Bishop Argetsinger and they have two children.

C DYLAN BASSETT {cdylanbassett@gmail.com} His translation, *A Failed Performance: The Complete Plays of Daniil Kharms*, is forthcoming from Plays Inverse Press in 2018. A graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, he's currently a PhD student in Literature and Creative Writing at UC-Santa Cruz.

MORONI BENALLY {moroni.benally@gmail.com} is completing his PhD at the University of Washington. Moroni earned his undergraduate degree in International Relations with an emphasis in Comparative International Political Economy from Stanford University and his Master of Public Policy with an emphasis in Social and Economic Policy from

Brigham Young University. He is currently the co-founder of the Utah League of Native American Voters in Salt Lake City.

GINA COLVIN {gina.colvin@canterbury.ac.nz} is a lecturer at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand. She is the author of the blog KiwiMormon (<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/kiwimormon/>) and also hosts the A Thoughtful Faith podcast (<http://www.athoughtfulfaith.org>).

MEGAN CONLEY {meginprogress@gmail.com} is a writer and speaker. She lives in Oakland with her daughters and husband. Her life's passions include fried chicken sandwiches, Studio Ghibli gifs, and biographies about sad poets.

LAURA HILTON CRANER {laurahcraner@gmail.com} is a ghostwriter, teacher, poet, essayist, and wannabe novelist. Having written for corporations big and small, for entrepreneurs and lawyers and chiropractors and others, work under her own name can be found in places like *Segullah*, *A Motley Vision*, and *The Wilderness Interface Zone*.

MICHAEL FILLERUP {michaelfillerup@yahoo.com} A native of southern California, Michael Fillerup is the author of numerous short stories, a short story collection *Visions and Other Stories*, two novels (*Beyond the River* and *Go in Beauty*), and mounds of obscure, unpublished, illegible drafts. According to his son Benjamin: "My father is the best unread author I've never read." Michael is the founder and former director of Puente de Hozho Tri-lingual School and the creator of the Indigenous Language Revitalization Summer Institute. He lives in northern Arizona with his wife, Rebecca, who doubles as his best friend and confidant, ruthless editor, and full-time Muse.

BERT FULLER {bert.fuller@gmail.com} is a licensed real estate agent in Utah County as well as a PhD student with the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Toronto.

IGNACIO M. GARCIA {Ignacio_Garcia@byu.edu} is the Lemuel Hardison Redd Jr. Professor of Western & Latino History at Brigham Young University. He is the author of six books on Mexican American civil rights, politics and sports, a war novel (*Can Tho*), and a memoir, *Chicano While Mormon: Activism, War and Keeping the Faith*. He is currently working on a biographical work of Eduardo Balderas, the first translator for the LDS Church. He has served as an LDS bishop twice.

ROBERT A. GOLDBERG {bob.goldberg@utah.edu} is Professor of History and Director of the Tanner Humanities Center at the University of Utah. He is the author of eight books with his last two, *Barry Goldwater* and *Enemies Within: The Culture of Conspiracy in Modern America* published by Yale University Press. Forthcoming from the University of Utah Press is an edited work with Jack and Linda Newell titled: *Conscience and Community: Sterling McMurrin, Obert C. Tanner, and Lowell Bennion*. In 2003, he held the Fulbright Distinguished Chair in American Studies at the Swedish Institute for North American Studies, Uppsala University. He was awarded the Rosenblatt Prize for Excellence in 2008.

MEL HENDERSON {dynamomel@gmail.com} has taught writing at BYU since 2012 and earned her MFA in Creative Nonfiction in 2016. She is a lifelong writer, compulsive researcher, voracious reader, and a believer in the healing power of stories. Her work has appeared in (and/or on) *Bloom for Women*, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, Literature and Belief*, *The Writing Disorder*, and a handful of other literary journals. She lives in Utah with her family and too many pets, because she was born without the ability to maintain reasonable distance from any animal in need.

SUSAN ELIZABETH HOWE {saltpoemssue@gmail.com} published her second poetry collection, *Salt*, in 2013; her third is in the works. Her poems have recently appeared in *Poetry*, *Pleiades*, *Atlanta Review*, *Western Humanities Review*, and other journals. A reviewer and contributing editor of *Tar River Poetry*, she lives with her husband Cless Young in Ephraim, Utah, and loves southern Utah's spectacular canyons and deserts.

SANDRA CLARK JERGENSEN {sandrajergensen@gmail.com} is the Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Segullah*. She recently edited and contributed to their just-released anthology, *Seasons of Change: Stories of Transition* from Peculiar Pages. Sandra combined her dual affections for writing and food through food studies in grad school and still hasn't released either, now balancing writing with a business teaching seasonal cooking. She and her family live and bike daily in Davis, California.

SHERILYN OLSEN {sheolsen@gmail.com} is the author of the inspiring, *Searched the World Over For Elie: An International Adoption Story*, and she presents workshops for state government. She is working towards her Master of Arts in English at Weber State University. She co-edits the blog at *Segullah*, where she also contributes and edits for the journal. Sherilyn writes essays and poetry, with pieces published in various magazines and journals. She and her family live in mountainous South Ogden, Utah.

SHANE R. PETERSON {shrpeters19@gmail.com} grew up near Las Vegas, Nevada, and attended Brigham Young University. There he studied English Literature and minored in Editing and Writing/Rhetoric. He has also served as one of the co-editors-in-chief of *Criterion: A Journal of Literary Criticism*. He is currently pursuing a PhD in rhetoric and composition at the University of Washington in Seattle.

CRISTINA ROSETTI {crose005@ucr.edu} is a doctoral candidate at the University of California, Riverside. Her research focuses on Mormon

practices of spirit communication and contemporary Mormon movements in the United States.

TYLER SWAIN {tyler.e.swain@gmail.com} From a very young age, Tyler has been interested in creating things. At the age of eight his parents enrolled him in private art lessons, where he learned the fundamentals of drawing and design. Years later he pursued art at the college level, first at Snow College, where he received an associate's degree, and finished at Utah State University earning a BFA in drawing and painting. Tyler has been the recipient of many awards and scholarships including the George and Marie Eccles Caine Endowment and the Outstanding Senior Award. In 2015, Tyler was featured by *Southwest Art Magazine* as one of "21 Under 31: Young Artists to Watch." Tyler is a current member of the International Guild of Realism and has exhibited his work in the western United States and Japan. He currently lives and works in northern Utah.

JOHNNY TOWNSEND {johnnytowntsendauthor@yahoo.com} earned an MFA in fiction writing from Louisiana State University. Six of his thirty-two books have been named to Kirkus Reviews' Best of the Year, including one about his two years as a gay missionary in Italy, "The Abominable Gayman." Most of his books are short story collections featuring gay, feminist, or otherwise unorthodox Mormons. He's also written about the Upstairs Lounge fire, an arson at a gay bar in the French Quarter of New Orleans that killed 32 people on Gay Pride Day in 1973. He is an associate producer for the documentary "Upstairs Inferno" on the same tragedy.

MOANA ULUAVE-HAFOKA {moanauluave@gmail.com} Moana Uluave-Hafoka was born in Salt Lake City, Utah. Moana is a Gates Millennium Scholar and graduated with University Honors from Brigham Young University in English and a minor in Sociology. In May 2014, she graduated with a Master's degree from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She previously served as a Community Program Assistant at

the Sorenson Unity Center, a Teaching Assistant with the Boston University Prison Education program, and as a paraprofessional at Edison Elementary School. Today, you can find Moana still living in Glendale with her husband, Maika and their baby, Linita. She loves writing brief but fierce essays and spending time with immediate and extended family.

MARGARET BLAIR YOUNG {margaret_young@byu.edu} spent twenty years working with Darius Gray on books and films about race and Mormonism, and now spends much of her time in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where she continues to work on film and also does work in education. She often takes her husband, Bruce Young, with her.

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