



# DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

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# DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

*is an independent quarterly established to express Mormon culture and to examine the relevance of religion to secular life. It is edited by Latter-day Saints who wish to bring their faith into dialogue with the larger stream of world religious thought and with human experience as a whole and to foster artistic and scholarly achievement based on their cultural heritage. The journal encourages a variety of viewpoints; although every effort is made to ensure accurate scholarship and responsible judgment, the views expressed are those of the individual authors and are not necessarily those of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or of the editors.*



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## A NOTE FROM THE ART EDITOR

This issue features the two paintings by Emily Fox King, “Bitumen” and “Mother’s Day,” whose vibrant florals convey both the beauty and complexity of lived experience. We have chosen to bring the vitality of these works into focus through a series of carefully selected crops. This closer look plays with the themes of whole, motion, change, and part as we move through the works piece by piece. If God is in the details, we find the Goddess in the whole. In collaboration with King’s works is the poetry of Melody Newey Johnson.

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

In the article “One Devout Mormon Family’s Experience With Racism,” which appeared in the Winter 2018 edition of Dialogue, I wrote that Jesse Ross Marshall died of suicide. This is an egregious error and a false rumor circulating in some areas of Utah. Mr. Marshall actually died from a serious, long-term illness. I regret the error and hope this note of regrets sets the record straight.

Sincerely,

Robert Greenwell





Emily Fox King  
Detail from "Mother's Day"  
oil on canvas

# CONDEMN ME NOT

Jody England Hansen

*Condemn me not because of mine imperfection, neither my father, because of his imperfection, neither them who have written before him; but rather give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been.*

—Moroni's words in Mormon 9:31

Years ago, in 2015, it was announced that women leaders were being added to Church leadership committees, including the temple committee. I hoped this meant changes would come to the gendered language of temple ordinances.

I had mourned when the most recent temple films were released in 2013 and I realized they included no changes to the script. Here was a perfect opportunity for such changes, complete with a new score and individual creation and garden depictions. But the archaic language remained.



I do not lend the weight of truth to the language of ritual. Such language is symbolic. But even in the context of symbolism, language that is so preferential toward men and dismissive of women—especially when such language more aptly demonstrates the bias of the writers than the purpose of the ritual—needs to be removed.

I have encountered historical accounts regarding the early development of temple ritual: there was much discussion and rewriting of the ceremonies, sometimes within a day, when Joseph was trying to figure it

all out initially. And there were many subsequent changes made by leaders and committees soon after Joseph, and in the years since then. This history need not alarm us or surprise us—after all, the concept of truth in the Restoration is that which is built up “line upon line, precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little” (Doctrine and Covenants 128:21).

I can only imagine the possible discussions held by the temple committee over the recent years, the black and white script in front of them, red pencils in hand. How many of the letters written by people—by women sharing their experiences, their concerns, and their pain—were read by this committee? How many comments were considered as the blood red lines were drawn by this generation, through the black and white words? How many pleas were heard? How many times was a phrase, or even a word, considered and debated, with some insisting it remain and others asking for cleansing. I don’t know how long it might take a committee of various people—as well intentioned, and as biased and flawed, as any of us—to embrace a completely equitable and inclusive language for a ceremony with ancient roots that has gone through countless changes, but that simultaneously has as many different meanings as participants.



Near the end of 2018, several friends and I discussed the rumors of coming changes to the temple ceremonies. A friend asked me for my wish list containing all of the changes I wanted to see. Since I have often spoken with temple and Church leaders regarding my own temple experiences, giving feedback at any opportunity about language and policy that has interrupted what can be a powerful learning experience in symbolic ritual, I had no problem coming up with a wish list.

But I surprised myself when I hesitated for a moment about what I would put at the top of the list. Initially, I had immediately thought of the crucial need to make the language of all ordinances completely



equitable, having no reference to gender specific roles. Then, for a moment, I thought of something else that I bring up every time someone asks me to help them have a healthy experience at the temple. I almost put it at the top of the list. So many tend to assume the ceremonies are literal, and have lost the practice of figurative learning. At the beginning of every endowment session, I want there to be a reminder and short instruction that what follows is a symbolic ritual, and to be understood as an individual journey for each person. I want every temple preparation class to include a history of symbolic ritual as well as pragmatic instruction on how to practice experiencing the power of symbolism.

While the top of my wish list for temple changes remained a wish for gender equitable language, I could not ignore the significance I placed on creating opportunities to better understand the temple ceremonies themselves as symbolic. Both of these wishes grew out of the central thematic tension of the temple experience itself: our individual significance and our potential for one-ness, both with each other, and with God.



There have been changes. I heard about and then experienced the most recent changes in the temple by January 3, 2019. I have mixed feelings about it.

I am grateful for what was removed, which consisted of much of the sexist language and action. There are still words that distinguish gender roles, and there are still differences in some of the ordinances between men and women. I see the changes as a step toward more equitable language, but not as achieving true gender equality at the linguistic level. I am concerned about some of the added phrases. The new, temporary intro gives some reference to the many and ongoing changes to the ceremony, but does not do much to indicate the nature of symbolic ritual, nor teach how to approach and learn from symbolic ritual. Other phrases can be interpreted as being more exclusive rather

than inclusive, depending on how one reads scripture and proclamations. The most valuable additions are the words spoken by Eve at the end, and I will return to these later. Many of these changes correspond with items on my wish list; however, there still remains more that I continue to hope for.

As soon as the most recent changes were implemented and reported on, many more people wanted—even needed—to talk about the temple language. I have had calls and messages every day since then from people, usually women, who are trying to process their feelings about these changes.

Friends of all ages, some very active and some no longer attending, struggled with wondering if the language of the covenants they had made prior to these changes was still binding for them, or whether those covenants automatically “updated” to their current form, with its more equitable language.

Several times, women messaged me in the middle of the night, unable to sleep. They wondered why, if these were changes positive for women, did a difference in wording for the men and the women remain? Why was language added that could trigger thoughts of polygamy? Many asked, “Why is it so hard? Some changes I have wanted to see for so long are finally here, but I still wonder if God loves me as much as His sons?”

These conversations reaffirmed my belief in the importance of receiving regular reminders and instruction concerning figurative learning and the history of symbolic temple rituals.

But all the education in the world cannot erase or minimize the pain that existed, and continues to exist for so many, when sexist, archaic language has long been a core part of rituals that are presented as being essential to salvation.

All of the blood red lines that were painstakingly drawn through the harmful words in the ceremony script—words that have pierced so many hearts with deep wounds—remain in our collective consciousness. The knowledge of these invisible lines cannot simply be ignored or erased.

This type of pain and trauma—the pain and trauma embedded within words that literally shaped an entire people’s concept of their present life and their potential eternity—this type of pain and trauma was felt for generations. True healing does not come through redaction only; this pain needs to be acknowledged in order to help temper and quell its destructive force.



Sometimes, all we can do is sit with each other, listen, and mourn that which burdens us in our journey to seek God.

I hear of the trauma felt by those who took what they heard about the temple as being doctrinal, or as an eternal truth. Much of the rhetoric about the temple is that it is the only way we can attain salvation, and that if everyone in our family did not attend and remain “temple worthy,” we would not be together in the eternities. The ritual, which was developed and designed to be a depiction of an ascension journey for each of us, instead became for many a literal depiction of literal beings, and binary gender roles were narrowly defined as only fitting the limited role of Adam, or of Eve.

I am in several LGBTQ parent groups. One of the most common fears I hear expressed from mothers whose child just came out is, “I am so afraid they are not safe staying in the Church. But I want them to stay so we can be together after this life.”

I wonder how we lost sight of the purpose of symbolic ritual, seeing it instead as a literal requirement with the power to separate us from those we love.

I kept sensing that in trying to fulfill a covenant to offer all to God, people felt they had to sacrifice not only themselves, but also everyone they loved on the altar of a stone building that we call a temple, for the sake of that stone building. The temple itself shifted culturally into a literal and physical entity into which people seemed to feel they had to



conform their own wills and experience. Significantly, this conforming always occurred according to someone else's narrative perspective—what they had heard, or saw, or interpreted, in an external narrative.

They were losing the spirit of Christ's message—that grace is constant, love is unconditional, and the Kingdom of God is within us—by trying to make the temple into something it isn't, instead of embracing it for what it can be.

I do not minimize or dismiss the trauma felt by those who struggle with the temple rituals. This trauma is very real.

I think anytime you take something that was designed to be symbolic (however imperfectly and however deeply biased the agenda of its creators), but then see it and try to experience it as literal, the result can be traumatic.

Are the recent changes going to make a difference for those who choose to attend? Can they bring comfort for those who felt struggle and pain with past language?

I think the answer is as individual as the journey.



No matter how much we try to teach the history of ritual, or the power of symbolic learning, I think we will struggle with any ceremony that holds such meaning for us.

I think it is what we do as humans. We want to have a clear answer; we want to know what something *means*. We want to be told what to do, and rely on someone else to be in charge.

I think this desire helps explain why the Garden story is common among so many civilizations.

When I experience the story of the Garden symbolically, I understand the entire narrative in all its parts and characters as all applying to me in different ways. When I see myself in all of it—all parts, all characters—then I can sink into a place of potential enlightenment concerning

what applies to me at this moment in my journey. The Garden story is a powerful archetype, and the powerful archetypes are the ones that apply to the human journey.

We are all in the Garden: a place of innocence, where all is laid out clearly and we are given the answers. We don't have to figure anything out. The Adam part of us is good with this.

There is also a part of us that is wondering if there is something more. The Eve part of us recognizes that we are meant to grow, even in ways that are unknown. We have a hunger for wisdom.

It is human to want to be safe in the Garden, to be told the answer, and to then blame someone else when things don't turn out or are difficult. And it is human to seek wisdom and to struggle with the difficulty of it.

It is also human to create, to want to be in power, and to be the messengers bringing good news.

In ritual, we can see that we are part of creating the very Garden in which we live, that we then feel led to leave. We create our world, piece by piece. We follow rules that provide order, we try to seek answers when we wonder, we turn to what inspires, and try to create again when things don't work out and opposition occurs.

Ritual in the temple symbolizes the human journey, in which we seek to ascend. And in that journey, we leave the Garden for a world—a world of fullness, of community, and of richness—in which we continue to seek God

I have moments nearly every day where I realize I am trying to remain in the Garden. A choice exists: we can move toward complexity and wisdom, or we can try to remain in a place of no opposition. The symbolic journey depicted in the temple ritual helps remind me of this choice and brings to mind what I have learned for myself in moments of enlightenment. There are a number of ways this choice is described, this moment of choosing the fruit and leaving the Garden: a paradigm shift, a dark night of the soul, an existential crisis, letting go and moving on, a loss of innocence. I think of the inexplicably heart-pounding,

breathless moments when I somehow know that going forward with a thought, or choice, or action will mean the end of life as I know it, and the beginning of a new way of being, full of unknown challenges. But to not move forward into this new existence when the possibility of deeper wisdom calls to me—that is something less than living. The Tree, an archetype for the Goddess, does not offer easy life. She invites me to deeper living.

I hope the new changes will encourage all to seek deeper understanding of ritual history, including what inspired the temple ceremony.



I have been thinking about what shaped my own temple experience, which started when I was a child.

I remember walking through a building that was under construction in 1963. I was about five and we had recently moved to Palo Alto. I was with my parents and we were visiting a friend who was working on the Oakland Temple. I saw rolls of carpet and wet paint signs. On the grounds, I saw the sprinkler lines being laid out and the space for the fountain. Later, after the Oakland Temple was finished and I knew that it was dedicated for ceremonies, I thought of how it was also still a building, made up of the same materials as any other. I could honor and revere what the purpose of the building was, without making that honor about the building itself.

Near that same time, during a visit to Salt Lake, my grandpa took us through the new annex of the Salt Lake Temple, which was under construction. He would talk very freely about the efforts to build this annex and the challenges and frustrations with other Church and temple leaders he encountered. He was quite candid with his feelings when he thought someone was being foolish about the project. I grew up realizing that everyone, including General Authorities, were subject to bias



and flaws, and could do some harmful things, sometimes at the same time they were doing great things.

I learned that the details of the temple buildings as well as the workings in them were designed by a committee of men who had different ideas and opinions, rarely agreed, sometimes broke their word, sometimes sought or followed inspiration, and occasionally were willing to try something different from their own usual way of doing things.

Grandpa had a deep love and reverence for temple work, and he would talk about it with us from the time we were little. This practice helped me see the way one could speak of something sacred with reverence without getting tripped up by the idea that you couldn't say anything about sacred things. He wanted us to be prepared to take part in something that was uniquely symbolic, and he, like many adults I knew during my life, recognized that being prepared and educated about the purpose and nature of something so unique could help me have a valuable experience. I heard him refer to the endowment as a spiritual play. I loved theater, and learned early that great theater was an excellent way to learn vicariously. The model of the Salt Lake temple looks like a theater, and the actors ascend up ramps and stairs as we journey through the rooms, to higher places.

I remember many parts of the temple ritual being spoken of in conference talks and in sacrament meetings. I remember prayer circles being held in my parent's house after fireside discussions. I even remember special prayer meetings patterned after the prayer circle, held in my student ward chapel, usually to pray for a member who was in extreme need. Temple ritual was a practice that carried over into life.

When I was twenty-five, I prepared to receive my endowments for no other reason than that I felt ready. I am grateful I did not attend as a requirement for a mission or marriage—for me, this was the right path, and I did it because I wanted to learn from my own ritual experience.

As I prepared, I especially appreciated my dad reminding me that the ritual was about me, and that what I learned is personal to me. I didn't

need to think that what anyone else thought the temple was about was true for me. And if anything did not lead me to see my connection to an all-loving God, I could set it aside. He reminded me that the rituals were designed and revised by men, starting with Joseph Smith and his fellow leaders, and then many others over the years. It had been changed many times. He expressed great trust that I was capable of seeing what was valuable, and what was not.

I think this preparation really helped me for the complex experience of the temple. Some parts spoke to me, and I felt I could find value in the ritual repetition. Other parts were so clearly relics of the isolated, defensive culture Brigham Young tried to create that I almost felt like I was getting a Church history lesson. I practiced setting aside those parts and relishing the others. I appreciated the prayer circle. This place where I could set aside any unkind feelings that might impede the spirit and connect with everyone to create one body, unified in seeking guidance and healing for the world, proved a powerful practice to take into my life.

The recent changes mean there are fewer words and layers that separate people in the temple. Will it be a place where more can find this kind of unifying practice?



Last week I heard from a woman who had been upset when her daughter became engaged a few months ago. This woman was not really sure why she did not look forward to her daughter getting married, especially since she really liked her future son-in-law. When she experienced the temple changes in January, her concerns about the marriage went away. She realized how much she had been hurt by the former language of the ceremony, and how much she did not want her daughter to experience this pain. Now that the ceremony had changed, she looked forward to sharing this ritual experience in which her daughter covenanted directly with God. Even though I still hope people will learn to see all the temple

rituals as symbolic, including the covenants, I find it hopeful that there are fewer words that could impede a unifying experience.

I hope the recent changes help more women find the experience of symbolically hearing and speaking directly to God one that empowers them to do so more completely in real life. There are so many messages in our society, our rhetoric, and our human nature that suggest we give up our seeking, our listening, and our divine connection, ceding our own rights to intermediaries. Anything that reminds us that God loves, knows and reaches out to each of us individually, and that nothing can separate us from that love, can encourage us to look for that in our own way.

About twenty-five years ago, I saw a PBS documentary about a woman on a ritual journey to a monastery high in the mountains of Japan. She kept a video journal as she traveled through the country, receiving instruction, hearing people share the limited information they were willing to give, and gradually leaving behind more and more of what she carried. Eventually, she could only go on foot, and climbed to a place in the mountains where she went through a ritual bath. From there, she was allowed to continue to the temple above, dressed only in simple clothes, taking nothing else. She was required to promise to only share the rest of her experience in a single Haiku, written after she completed her journey. The few words of the haiku described how her sleeve was wet with the tears she had shed, because of the moving sacred experience at the temple.

Those words told me all. I could not gain more by knowing the details of what precisely was powerful to her, or why it was so. She had immersed herself in the journey, and found her own self. This realization provided me with another reminder to let go of the concept of an external, inherent truth in a sacred ritual. Instead, I look for the truth that is mine alone, and encourage others to find theirs. I look for ways to experience deeper seeking in my life journey.

I thought, for a time, that the more fulfilling journeys would be found outside familiar ritual. About twelve years ago, I was rarely making

time to attend the temple. I had had some powerful experiences there, and had appreciated being in a space where there was little distraction from contemplation, or conversation with God and ancestors. I felt I had learned what I wanted from the ceremonies, and did not feel much need to be there often, other than to seek a peaceful place of meditation. Then, one day, I sensed my dad (years after he had died) asking me to go once a week. It was not clear why I felt this request, but I was willing to see what happened.

It was not too many years before I felt I could also wet my sleeve with the tears shed because of what I learned in sacred ritual.

### *An Offering of Certainty*

There is nothing that is more difficult, or more important to let go of, and to sacrifice in this way, than my firm ideas of how things should be. No amount of time or money or resources I offer can compare to offering up my firmly held certainty that I already know all I need to about something. My certainty in the sufficiency of my own knowledge is precious to me—that is why I practice laying it on the altar. And in the space that is created through this offering, my heart and mind might find room to create new worlds.

### *Connection through Names*

The practice of finding names, preparing them, and carrying them has become just one part of a larger structure designed to experience deep connection. Much of the vicarious work many have done in recent years has been performed for temple names, about whom we know nothing. I invite you to consider, when you speak the name you hold, that in a sense you become them, for a short time. I invite you to think of their life, and how it might be similar to yours. In practicing this conscious connection through names, for a moment, time and distance have little power, and I feel a oneness and a love that reaches through the veil. Death is overcome. For me, the sealing power is love. All external structures and

processes are simply various means to help me experience the presence of others about whom I would know nothing if not for this experience of vicariously being them in their journey toward God.

My heart is turned to them, and I trust their heart is aware of me. My fears, challenges, and joys become theirs, and theirs are mine.

From this, I learn to turn my heart to those around me, and try to let differences in opinions, ideology, choices, and experiences have as little power as time and distance and death have when I am one with the names in the temple. Christ's teaching to learn to love my enemies, because they are no longer my enemies in Christ, is now connected to the call to turn hearts to each other through this sealing power of love. The deep and confronting lesson of Christ is to love one another. If there is anyone I don't love, then I don't love anyone. Godlike love has no limits. When I seal myself to each and all with this kind of love, there is nothing that can overcome me, and the world will not be destroyed by any curse of division.

I wonder how many times those beyond the veil might have felt the shared pain of the former ritual language. I wonder how much our ancestors still try to influence our ritual that has ancient roots.



A few years ago, I stayed to do initiatories for several hours. I just kept asking for more names and was practically on autopilot, going through the motions, repeating the words and promises of the ordinance in my head. Then came a moment in which countless people from past generations seemed to be present, their voices rushing into my mind, wanting me to be aware. I could almost hear the pleas from Joseph, and Brigham, and Emma, and my ancestors: "We can't be there to cleanse you from our blood, our sins. We did what we knew how to do. Please. Cleanse each other. Be clean from our mistakes, our fear. Love each other. Take care of each other. Please."



I tried to be present to the countless beings who seemed to be trying to finish a work they could not see how to fully accomplish during their life. The work is not about fear, or sin, or punishment, or differences, or conditions. It is about love. God's love is what makes us all worthy to be in Their presence. It is what makes us all Their anointed. This love is what the journey is about.

When any of us reach out to bless, or witness, or offer anything in the promise of symbolic covenants that are meant to last beyond death, I see a connection beyond the persons who are physically present. This moment of connection reaches through each of us to all those we know and love, and all they know and love, sealing us all, through past and future generations, forever.

The words of an early Mormon hymn speak to me, as they might have inspired my ancestors.

There is no end to glory;  
There is no end to love;  
There is no end to being;  
There is no death above.<sup>1</sup>



The recent changes include added language that I find powerful. The instruction I still hope to see added at the beginning now has some presence near the end.

In great theater, the most important lines are spoken by the final voice. Now, the final voice is the voice of Eve, reminding us that the life that leads us to God is the one where we dwell in opposition and still find the joy in it, and where we multiply and replenish when we grow in wisdom. This concept is what I value in the Book of Moses.

---

1. LDS Hymn #284 "If You Could Hie To Kolob" Text: William W. Phelps, 1792–1872

And in that day Adam blessed God and was filled . . . saying: Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God.

And Eve was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient. (Moses 5:10, 11)v

In 2015, I was an ordinance worker in the Denver Temple. Days after the release of the November 2015 policy excluding children of LGBT parents from baptism, I struggled to go and work my usual shift at the temple. I was sad and hurting. My coordinator noticed. She pulled me aside and asked me to share my burden with her. I wept as I told her of the deep hurt of this destructive policy. She only expressed love for me, and told me that God looks on the heart. She knew God saw my heart, and cherishes me and everyone. She told me to take all the time I needed, and to do what I felt I needed to do.

I sat for a long time in the celestial room, where there were no distractions.

At different times I felt my dad there, and my grandma Josephine, whose name I have. There was a presence of Divine Parents, and Christ. I felt Their message: “Yes. This hurts. I am so sorry for the pain. I am here. You can stay as long as you want. You can be where you need to. You don’t have to do anything. I am here”

And: “There are people here. Some might be here for the last time. They are also hurting. There is work to do. I will help you.

I am here.”

After a long time, I went and worked in initiatory for several hours. They were unusually busy. There were women there who were weeping quietly the whole time. Some seemed worried, some calm, some happy.

As I placed my hands on their heads and spoke blessings, pronouncing forgiveness and cleansing, I saw that I was reaching through them and the name they carried, back through all ancestors, forward to all

that would follow, out to all people in their life, speaking, pleading, blessings: clarity, life, strength, repentance, power, cleansing, forgiveness. This is one-ness. We experience God by experiencing each other with no barriers.

My deep, sacred experiences with God have not been in the safety of the Garden. They have been in the broken woundedness of wisdom seeking, where the opposites can't offer simple answers. A deeper love is present in wisdom seeking, and joy is felt in connection with the divine.

Perhaps the recent changes will invite a deeper connection with God, and with each other.

My hope is that every journey we choose, symbolic or otherwise, will help us find our way to each other in oneness.

# THE MOTHER TREE: UNDERSTANDING THE SPIRITUAL ROOT OF OUR ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Kathryn Knight Sonntag

Imagine two circles, largely but not completely overlapping. The center, a tall oval of convergence, and on each side, facing crescents. One of the two circles is the dominant element of culture, men. The other, the muted element of culture, women. Both the crescent that belongs to men only and the crescent that belongs to women only are wilderness. However, as Elaine Showalter explains, “All of male consciousness is within the circle of the Dominant structure and thus accessible to or structured by language.”<sup>1</sup> Women know what the male crescent is like, even if they have never seen it, because it becomes spoken culture, the histories and mythologies of a people. These myths shape ideologies surrounding built and natural environments. What is understood in the twenty-first century as “nature” is really a curated environment built around industrial needs, urbanization, and selected areas of wildness, the boundaries of which are ever-eroding. The earth’s wildness has no place in “nature,” which has become man’s property.

But the experience of women as women, their wilderness crescent, is unshared with men—utterly other—and therefore to men, unnatural. In the words of Ursula K. Le Guin:

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1. Elaine Showalter, “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness,” *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 2 (1981): 200.

This is what civilization has left out, what culture excludes, what the Dominants call animal, bestial, primitive, undeveloped, unauthentic—what has not been spoken, and when spoken, has not been heard—what we are just beginning to find words for, our words not their words: the experience of women. For dominance-identified men and women both, that is true wildness. Their fear of it is ancient, profound, and violent. The misogyny that shapes every aspect of our civilization is the institutionalized form of male fear and hatred of what they have denied and therefore cannot know, cannot share: that wild country, the being of women.<sup>2</sup>

Early authors of the ecofeminist movement instituted women's relationship with the natural world in modern discourse. Established as both an ecological philosophy and a social movement in the early 1970s, ecofeminism began by citing "the existence of a unique and significant relationship between women and nature and, on that basis, [it] advocates specifically women's environmental activism to save the Earth."<sup>3</sup>

A multidisciplinary group of scholars recognized the historical associations between women and nature. In 1974, cultural anthropologist Sherry Ortner published "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" arguing that "women's subordination to men is rooted in their symbolic connection to nature."<sup>4</sup> Environmental historian and philosopher Carolyn Merchant followed with "The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution" about how "modern science's mechanistic worldview has enabled the simultaneous exploitation of nature and subordination of women."<sup>5</sup> In Ortner's words, "The universality of female subordination, the fact that it exists within every type of social and

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2. Ursula K. Le Guin, "Woman/Wilderness," in *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), 163.

3. Juliann Emmons Allison, "Ecofeminism and Global Environmental Politics," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (print publication date: Mar. 2010, online publication date: Nov. 2017).

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

economic arrangement and in societies of every degree of complexity, indicates to me that we are up against something very profound, very stubborn, something we cannot rout out simply by rearranging a few tasks and roles in the social system, or even by reordering the whole economic structure.”<sup>6</sup>

If conceptions of nature are built around just one crescent of human experience, male, it is clear that the intergenerational repercussions of woman’s dismissal and subordination, her separation from her own wild nature, reverberate in every facet of her being, affecting the health of the world. A lodestar in restoring the voice and psyche of women is Jungian analyst and cantadora Clarissa Pinkola Estés. For over twenty years Dr. Estés researched the archetype of the Wild Woman. This facet of the female psyche is primal, wild, but has been twisted and hidden by the forces of culture. She remains, however, in the traces of the myths, folk tales, and stories of many cultures—instinctual, visionary.

Consequently, Dr. Estés is keenly aware of the devastations of the female unconscious that accompany women starved of these attributes. Dr. Estés gathered women’s own language to describe the grim symptoms of a disrupted relationship with the wildish force of the psyche. They include: “feeling extraordinarily dry, fatigued, frail, depressed, confused, gagged, muzzled, unaroused. Feeling frightened, halt or weak, without inspiration, without animation, without soulfulness, without meaning, shame-bearing, chronically fuming, volatile, stuck, uncreative, compressed, crazed.”<sup>7</sup> She contrasts this desiccated sense of being with the attributes of the Mother wolf, fresh with blood, making tracks, and herding her brood through wilderness with authority—Nature in her unadulterated form. It becomes possible, then, to imagine what a society

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6. Sherry B. Ortner, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?,” in *Woman, Culture, and Society*, edited by Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1974), 68.

7. Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 11.



might look like that has returned to nature's ways, filled with women inhabiting their own authority. For now, the world is left in a state of ecological disaster.

### A False Paradigm of Separateness Promotes Ecological Fraying

It is impossible to separate what has been done to women from what has been done to the land. Both are distrusted. Both are removed from their wildness. They are feared, tamed, and contorted into knowable forms, into extractable resources. Dominance-identified men and women do not say nature is sacred because they distrust it. Their definition does not include humanity. It is their construct; just as most of what is said and known about women is myth and construct.<sup>8</sup>

Because the essential networks of interconnection that define the sanctity of the earth and women are muted, rigorous scientific study that gathers enough understanding of ecological systems to honor and protect them is ignored in the face of lust for immediate gains that cut at the last roots of the living world. Humankind's large-scale environmental degradations demonstrate that the forces of industrialization perceive that natural systems' inherent value is inferior to extractable resources for immediate human consumption. Consumption is spreading at an uncontainable scale and rate. The pride behind this wanton destruction of eternal networks in the physical and spiritual spheres of the wild is the same pride that has removed Heavenly Mother from her temple throne and attempted to accelerate the silencing of women. The ramifications? A slow suicide.

Social and economic structures that promote this commodity-based view of the natural world have not been kept from influencing the worldviews of Church members and the Church's own institutional structure. Unfortunately, this contributes to a spiritual and cognitive dissonance toward the land and the true substance of divine feminine

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8. Le Guin, "Woman/Wilderness," 162.

identity. A full appreciation of these aspects is necessary for a full restoration of the gospel, one that plants the Mother tree in the temple as the giver of life and the healer of the environmentally degraded world.

### An Uprooted Eco-Spirituality

As long as the institutional structure of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints remains a patriarchy, its behaviors and correlated teachings will uphold the mistreatment of women and nature by defining them as appendages of men, to be tamed and used, not heard or understood. Hearing women and valuing their voices dissolves the pride that sustains all patriarchal structures. A patriarchy is an inherently telestial system where equality is impossible. In the words of Gina Colvin, “It’s a given that women aren’t equal to men in the church—and any argument that brawls with this fact is a nonsense. While men are granted the exercise of ecclesiastical and managerial authority over women—that is called a patriarchy.”<sup>9</sup>

While the Church has recently placed emphasis on the need for greater environmental stewardship, it has largely come through public-facing statements on the Newsroom website and in speeches presented at symposiums rather than to the membership by way of general conferences or standardized materials.<sup>10</sup> These outward-facing statements are not a part of LDS discourse in any developed, systematic way and effect

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9. Gina Colvin, “Ordain Women, But . . . : A Womanist Perspective,” in *Mormon Feminism: Essential Writings*, edited by Joanna Brooks, Rachel Hunt Steenblik, and Hannah Wheelwright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 271.

10. See, for example, “Environmental Stewardship and Conservation,” *Gospel Topics Essays*, available at <https://www.lds.org/topics/environmental-stewardship-and-conservation?lang=eng>; “Environmental Conservation and Stewardship Efforts,” *Mormon Newsroom*, <https://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/environmental-conservation-stewardship-efforts>; Steven E. Snow, “The Moral Imperative of Environmental Stewardship,” *Mormon Newsroom*, <https://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/the-moral-imperative-of-environmental-stewardship-elder-steven-e-snow>; “Selected Scriptures and Church Leader

little change. To find environmental statements by General Authorities in the Church, one must search through the decades to find isolated commentary. For example, former President Ezra Taft Benson said in 1976, “Irreverence for God, of life, and for [humankind] takes the form of things like littering, heedless strip mining, [and] pollution of water and air. But these are, after all, outward expressions of the inner man.”<sup>11</sup> While these words bring attention to the spiritual issues behind environmental waste and destruction, they were prepared for the White House Forum on Domestic Policy in Denver, Colorado and have had little more effect on current LDS discourse than that of a small bandage on a wound that has been hemorrhaging for decades. Ultimately, they fail, as all statements will within the Church’s current patriarchal paradigm, to elucidate Mother in Heaven’s fundamental role in the design of the purposes and paths of creation.<sup>12</sup>

The patriarchal lens of the Church creates tension and dissonance around LDS theology that attributes all living beings with a soul, with an individual purpose and identity, and that promises their celestialization along with Earth’s. Instead of carving out a unique paradigm that honors and sustains the ecologies connecting all living beings on the earth, the Church has largely taken on the inherent attitudes of dominance-identified men and women: that the earth is to be used as those in power see fit. What follows is an underlying belief by many of its members, compounded by eschatological theories, that things will go as they will for the earth and there isn’t much to be done to stop it. Its mentality is a modern-day iteration of the sorrowing of the damned.

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Statements on Environmental Stewardship and Conservation,” *Mormon Newsroom*, <https://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/environment-statements>.

11. Ezra Taft Benson, “Problems Affecting the Domestic Tranquility of Citizens of the United States of America,” *Vital Speeches* 42, no. 8 (Feb. 1976): 240.

12. Margaret Barker, “Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?,” Department for External Church Relations of the Moscow Patriarchate, <http://orthodoxeurope.org/page/11/1/7.aspx>.

This fatalistic view of the earth creates a disconnect from the rape and abuse of the land and of women: it is sad but inevitable and only discussed peripherally. The beauty of the earth is mentioned in songs and occasionally over the pulpit, but there is little talk about the spiritual consequences of its destruction. Relatedly, there is little official discourse about the abuse of women in the Church. When stories surface, they are immediately buried under counter-accusations and victim-blaming; over and over again, women have to fight to be heard and to have the power of the patriarchal institutions on their side.<sup>13</sup> As patriarchy fears the creative powers of the wild, it fears the creative powers of women and their voices that cast a spiritual warning about collective abuses of their bodies and the body of the earth. There is no room within the walls of any patriarchy for women to speak as women, to voice the primal and primary roles that are theirs in the cycling of life to death and back to life. Consequently, women, wild with desire for their birthright, are opening paths of understanding to Heavenly Mother. Saints across the globe are seeking and finding answers on their own, through personal revelation and through creative works that are becoming the greatest force for ushering in exiled Lady Wisdom.

Women preside in the rites of birth and death; tend to children, the sick, and elderly; and are, therefore, a constant reminder of the inevitability of death, representing the unknown and uncontrollable. As Ortner states, “Because of woman’s greater bodily involvement with the natural functions surrounding reproduction, she is seen as more a part of nature than man is. Yet in part because of her consciousness and participation in human social dialogue, she is recognized as a participant in culture. Thus, she appears as something intermediate between

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13. One example is the case of the BYU rapes, daylighted through the courage of women. BYU then changed its policies. See Jack Healy, “At Brigham Young, a Cost in Reporting a Rape,” *New York Times*, Apr. 26, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/27/us/rape-victims-brigham-young-university-honor-code-suspensions.html>.

culture and nature, lower on the scale of transcendence than man.”<sup>14</sup> This hierarchy bleeds into the mindset of LDS men and women. They are lulled by the trappings of a false power structure, and Mother of Heaven and her daughters are not only veiled but also violently severed from their true identity with no map to the Tree.

### A Cosmos without A Tree

The cosmological failings of the correlated gospel include an omission of woman’s true realm, her powers, her voice, her dimensions. Likewise, Heavenly Mother is faceless, nameless, voiceless. Even Mormon feminists have been caught within the constructs of the Church’s patriarchal framework when articulating, in the words of Taylor G. Petrey, “Mother in Heaven’s identity and roles in order to represent their own needs and desires of the ideal woman and their calls for reforming the theology.”<sup>15</sup>

Within this context, Heavenly Mother is not located in a place of agency but instead reconsidered in domestic iterations. In these scenarios, and in the words of Melodie Moench Charles, “Heavenly Mother is not an equal partner with Heavenly Father in any sense. She is second to her husband in everything, to her son in many things, and even to the Holy Ghost. Since she has no sphere of operations, she has no power.”<sup>16</sup>

What does women’s heaven look like, spoken from their own lips out of their own hearts? What is the spirit and soul of their Creatress like? In short, what is the character of their own spirits? There are more answers available than have been given space in LDS discourse. They have not entered with full force into the discourse of LDS theology because Mother is still missing from her temple home as the source of women’s

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14. Ortnier, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?” 68–87.

15. Taylor G. Petrey, “Rethinking Mormonism’s Heavenly Mother,” *Harvard Theological Review* 109, no. 3 (July 2016): 322.

16. Melodie Moench Charles, “The Need for a New Mormon Heaven,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 21, no. 3 (Fall 1988): 84.

spiritual orientation and nourishment. Again, women must follow the crumbs that Dr. Estés has left behind to mark as a trail. A healthy woman, full of the wisdom of her Mother, “is much like a wolf: robust, chock-full, life-giving, territorially aware, inventive, loyal, roving.”<sup>17</sup> She embodies the wildness of the Wild Woman archetype. “She is the Life/Death/Life force, the incubator. She is intuition, far-seer, and deep listener. She encourages humans to remain multilingual; fluent in the languages of dreams, passions, and poetry. She thunders after injustice.”<sup>18</sup> She is not separate from the networks that create life; she maps them on her body. She “finds heartening instead of fear in the darkness of regeneration.”<sup>19</sup> She is the cosmological center. In the words of Mircea Eliade, “All religious experiences connected with fecundity and birth have a cosmic structure. The sacrality of woman depends on the holiness of the earth.”<sup>20</sup> Women represent the web of relationships born of Heavenly Mother, from whom they inherit creative powers. Like the Mother, women are the connective power between heaven and earth, administering their own life-giving ordinances.

### Heavenly Mother: The Seal of Creation

Mother is a tree. Her roots reach down into the underworld; her body is the flesh and blood of the present, the passage between life and death; her branches path to the heavens. She represents eternal life in the most primal sense, as the preserver of the interrelationships of all beings and the earth around them. She knows everything that lives by name, why and how each came to be. She knows that for women and men to follow the righteous example of the rest of creation and fulfill the measure of their

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17. Estés, *Women Who Run With the Wolves*, 12–13.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*, 147.

20. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, translated by Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, 1957), 144.

creation, they must choose to take part in the everlasting covenant. She is the Tree of Life, the Axis Mundi, the vertical marking of the center of the cosmos, the conceptual and ceremonial center, marking the point of intersection of the cardinal directions.<sup>21</sup> The tree of life has always been a symbol of the divine feminine. Specifically, in the Old Testament, the tree is the representation of Asherah, an Israelite goddess. She is the lady in the temple, the source of fecundity and eternal life. Christ is her fruit.<sup>22</sup>

Asherah was one in a family of gods worshipped in the first Jerusalem temple and part of a larger council of gods. This family included the Father, the Highest; the Mother, the consort-goddess Asherah and personification of wisdom; and the Son, called the Lord.<sup>23</sup> There is much textual evidence to support that the Son and Father were blurred into the one God of the current Hebrew Bible, and Wisdom the Mother was banished, surviving in allusions and fragments.<sup>24</sup> Abraham's earliest form of temple worship was altered by King Josiah in the sixth century BCE to adhere with the book of the law. This book was discovered during the temple's renovation and is either a version of Deuteronomy or an extracanonical law code.<sup>25</sup> The supporters of this law code are referred to as the Deuteronomists, and their temple and worship reforms "caused the loss of what were likely many plain and precious things. Among these were the older ideas, symbols, possibly entire rituals, and forms of words from the temple as its adherents had known it, including the Lady Wisdom."<sup>26</sup>

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21. Ibid., 33–36.

22. Margaret Barker, *The Mother of the Lord*, vol 1., *The Lady in the Temple* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 190.

23. Zina Petersen, "Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?" *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 7 (2013): 100.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.



The removal of Asherah from the Holy of Holies of the temple was the removal of the urtext of women; the sacred script that unfolded their role in salvation. It was the rejection of the ecological wisdom encoded in the everlasting covenant. In the words of Bible scholar Margaret Barker, Josiah also “destroyed the high places and pillars and burned Asherah, the sacred tree.”<sup>27</sup> At the time of the purge, Barker notes, groups of believers of the older faith (such as Lehi and his family) left or were driven from Jerusalem and, in their exile, continued the older forms of Abrahamic worship.<sup>28</sup> These older beliefs are found in texts such as the Book of Weeks and the Apocalypse of Enoch, as well as in the Book of Mormon. Close readings of the Bible reveal evidence for the older traditions in Ezekiel, Psalms, Micah, Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, and parts of Isaiah. Many of these prophets condemn “not only foreigners, enemies, or invaders from outside the kingdom but also the changes they saw from the religion of Abraham to that of Moses, and his Law.”<sup>29</sup>

According to Barker, “the sins of Jerusalem that Isaiah condemned were not those of the ten commandments, but those of the Enoch tradition: pride (e.g., Isa. 2:11, 17), rebellion (e.g., Isa. 1:23, 1:28, 5:24) and loss of Wisdom (e.g., Isa. 2:6, 3:12, 5:12).”<sup>30</sup> The first chapter of the Book of Proverbs gives voice to rejected Lady Wisdom: “How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing, and fools hate knowledge? Give heed to my reproof and I will pour out my spirit on you . . . because I called and you refused to listen . . . and you have ignored all my counsel . . . I will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when panic strikes you . . . when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call upon me but I will not answer, they will seek me diligently but they will not find

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27. Barker, *The Mother of the Lord*, 24.

28. *Ibid.*, 75.

29. Petersen, “Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?” 104.

30. Barker, *The Mother of the Lord*, 53.

me” (Prov. 1:22–28). This is the Goddess speaking.<sup>31</sup> These are women’s words of warning. This is wilderness promising that the very wildness that has stirred up such disdain will roll out on the earth the wrath of the Mother whose counsel is ignored.

Lady Wisdom spoke from the cosmological center of the Israelites, from her home in the Holy of Holies about the mysteries of creation. The Holy of Holies (Prov. 8) was constructed as a perfect cube and lined with gold to represent the light and fire of the divine presence (2 Chr. 3:8). Barker states, “Wisdom is described in Proverbs 8.30 as the *amon* in creation, a word not found elsewhere, but thought to mean ‘architect.’ The Greek, however, translated it *harmozousa*, the one who joins together (Prov. 8:30), which implies that She was remembered as the bond of the everlasting covenant.”<sup>32</sup> The everlasting covenant was given to all living beings, not just men and women, as a way to preserve the connections forged on the earth and with Earth eternally. Barker continues, “The prophets linked covenant not to the Lord’s exclusive relationship to his people, but to the Creator’s relationship to the creation.”<sup>33</sup> Breaking the everlasting covenant means destroying the fabric of creation. It is a rejection of the feminine aspect of deity, her admonitions and eternal wisdom. The scriptures below suggest that “covenant” had a meaning connected with the order and stability of creation:<sup>34</sup>

Behold I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you . . . the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth (Gen. 9:9–10, 16).

The earth mourns and withers . . . for they have broken the everlasting covenant . . . (Isa. 24:5).

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31. Barker, “Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?”

32. Ibid.

33. Barker, *The Mother of the Lord*, 209.

34. Ibid.

I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the air and the creeping things of the ground (Hos. 2:18).

### Conclusion: Salvation is Dependent on Revering the Ecologies of Creation

Isaiah prophesied that during the last days the earth would be cursed because of transgression: “The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left” (Isa. 24:5–6). It could not be more clear: salvation is dependent on revering the ecologies of creation and the physical, emotional, and spiritual ties that bind it.

As the seal of creation, Heavenly Mother’s continued exile from the temple and from the religious and cultural life of contemporary Saints is in partial fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. Her return to her rightful place in the temple will give women their divine archetype back and speaking grounds for not only their place in LDS cosmology but their place in healing the world. Her return will signify a restoration of humility, and love for all that is wild that will bring her offering as life-giver and eternal center of the actualized principles of wisdom to fruition. To enter the Holy of Holies, into the promises of celestial glory—a unified, holistic view of the entirety of creation—is to reverence a wild and mysterious Mother and her wild daughters, to learn the purposes of creation, the grand and the terrible, to contemplate the darkest abyss in order to discern the most brilliant light. It is to ultimately be entrusted with the understanding of the paths of everything that lives.<sup>35</sup>

What Moses actually saw on Sinai, as remembered by Baruch, the scribe of the prophet Jeremiah, was in part the transformation of the mountain into the Holy of Holies, a consecrated and purified space

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35. *Ibid.*, 283.

where Moses saw the creation of the world and learned the law.<sup>36</sup> These revelations were the mysteries of godliness, the wild heart of Heavenly Mother. This was Moses entering into true wildness. He was shown:

The measures of fire, the depths of the abyss, the weight of the winds, the number of the raindrops, the suppression of wrath, the abundance of long suffering, the truth of judgement, the root of wisdom, the richness of understanding, the fountain of knowledge, the height of the air, the greatness of Paradise, the end of the periods, the beginning of the day of judgement, the number of offerings, the worlds which have not yet come, the mouth of hell, the standing place of vengeance, the place of faith, the region of hope, the picture of coming punishment, the multitude of angels which cannot be counted, the powers of the flame, the splendour of lightnings, the voice of the thunders, the order of the archangels, the treasures of the light, the changes of the times, and the enquiries into the Law. (2 Baruch 59:4–11)

Approaching the Mother tree in order to partake of Christ the fruit is to enter into the way of all abundance. The Creatress, with El and Yahweh, will usher souls into eternal life who are trusted with the mysteries of creation, to better understand wildness as the vast web of interconnections and relationships to energies, matter, and souls. The Father's and the Mother's evaluation of their children will be based on the doctrine of Christ: to become as little children (3 Ne. 11:37–38). The roots of the word "innocent" mean to be free of injury or hurt. In Spanish it is understood to mean a person who tries not to harm others and who also is able to heal any injury or harm to herself.<sup>37</sup> All children are wild. All were wild once and lived in the wild country of the Mother tree. She is prophesied to return. It is time to usher her in.

On the Day of Atonement  
Her return is as Her departure,  
" . . . the sound of many waters."

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36. Ibid., 218.

37. Estés, *Women Who Run With the Wolves*, 152.

A rush of angels and measuring reeds, laws  
pour out in a clamor of tongues, framing  
cubit by cubit.

To the Holy of Holies, through the eastern gate,  
Glory fills the temple—a river springs  
from its center, Her branches spreading  
on its banks, whose leaves  
are for healing.

Whose fruit is for wisdom and whose oil  
is for anointing, to open the eyes to unerring  
knowledge of what exists. She, the bond who holds  
all things in harmony, She, the seal of creation, pours  
out of the mouth of the Most High,  
covering the earth like a mist.

My eyes were enlightened and my face  
received the dew.<sup>38</sup>

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38. Kathryn Knight Sonntag, from “Ezekiel’s Visions,” in *The Tree at the Center* (Salt Lake City: By Common Consent Press, 2019), 64–65.



Emily Fox King  
Detail from "Bitumen"  
oil on canvas



# QUEER POLYGAMY

Blaire Ostler

According to many accounts of LDS theology, polygamy, also called celestial marriage, is a necessary mandate for the highest degree of celestial glory. Doctrine and Covenants sections 131 and 132 tell us that celestial marriage and the continuation of the human family will enable us to become gods because we will have endless, everlasting increase (D&C 132:20). The Doctrine and Covenants gives a direct warning that if we do not abide by the law of polygamy, we cannot attain this glory (D&C 132:21). Likewise, prophets have stated that theosis and plural marriage are intimately intertwined. Brigham Young, the most notable advocate for mandated polygamy, stated, “The only men who become Gods, even the sons of God, are those who enter into polygamy.”<sup>1</sup> However, he also wrote, “if you desire with all your hearts to obtain the blessings which Abraham obtained you will be polygamists at least in your faith.”<sup>2</sup> It is interesting that he uses the words “at least in your faith.” Was this to suggest that if a man cannot practice polygamy on earth, he will in heaven? Or is this to suggest a man may never enter into a polygamous marriage, but may live the spirit of polygamy in his heart? Later, Wilford Woodruff recorded in his journal that “President Young said there would be men saved in the Celestial Kingdom of God with one wife with Many wives & with No wife at all.”<sup>3</sup> Woodruff also wrote, “Then

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1. Brigham Young, Aug. 19, 1866, *Journal of Discourses*, 11:269.

2. Ibid.

3. “I attended the school of the prophets. Brother John Holeman made a long speech upon the subject of Poligamy [*sic*]. He Contended that no person Could have a Celestial glory unless He had a plurality of wives. Speeches were made By L. E. Harrington O Pratt Erastus Snow, D Evans J. F. Smith Lorenzo

President Young spoke 58 Minutes. He said a Man may Embrace the Law of Celestial Marriage in his heart & not take the Second wife & be justified before the Lord.”<sup>4</sup> What is to be made of these statements? How can one embrace the spirit of polygamy, the law of celestial marriage, but remain monogamous with one wife or even no wives?

This paper will refer to the sex-focused, androcentric, patriarchal, heteronormative model of polygyny as the Standard Model. At a glance, the Standard Model is highly problematic. Though the Standard Model tends to dominate discourse, a more creative interpretation of what the spirit of polygamy includes may offer new insight into what celestial relationships might look like. I’m suggesting a way to reconcile diverse desires for celestial marriage under a new model I call Queer Polygamy, which encompasses the spirit of polygamy without mandating specific marital relations. I will begin with an expository of the Standard Model of polygamy followed by an expository of the Queer Polygamy Model and demonstrate how plural marriage may be redeemed to accommodate diverse relationships and desires, as Brigham Young suggests. I will then point out five common concerns with the Standard Model of polygamy and how the Queer Polygamy Model address them.

The Standard Model of polygamy is often and reductively described as one man having multiple wives. The man will continue to increase in power and dominion according to the number of wives and children he accumulates. This means he is eternally sealed to all his wives and children as a god, like Heavenly Father, who also must have entered into plural marriage. To attain the highest degree of celestial glory and

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Young. President Young said there would be men saved in the Celestial Kingdom of God with one wife with Many wives & with No wife at all” (Wilford Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, edited by Scott G. Kenny, 9 vols. [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1985], 6:527 [journal entry dated Feb. 12, 1870]).

4. Woodruff, *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 7:31 (journal entry dated Sept. 24, 1871).

have eternal increase, a man must enter into polygamy. The Standard Model focuses exclusively on the man or patriarch with little regard to what others, especially women and children, desire.

This aesthetic of God and godhood is problematic for many reasons. This view paints a rather androcentric and domineering perspective of what polygamy might look like. Additionally, this makes God a patriarchal monarch whose power and glory aren't shared with his family and community but used at the expense of his family and community. If God evolved into godhood as a lone patriarch, his power is not holy but tyrannical. This patriarchal model of God, polygamy, sealings, celestial glory, and heaven are not a vision of glory most of us would aspire to as Saints in Zion. The Standard Model also neglects doctrines concerning the law of consecration, theosis for all, and other communal practices of Zion. The people of Zion live together as one in equality (D&C 38:24–27; 4 Ne. 1:3), having one heart and one mind (Moses 7:8). The Saints of Zion *together* enjoy the highest degree of glory and happiness that can be received in this life and, if they are faithful, in the world to come. Zion can be thought of as a template for how gods become gods. Yet the Standard Model of polygamy doesn't resemble anything Latter-day Saints might want to strive for. The God of the Standard Model sounds more like a venture capitalist accruing wives and children for self-glorification rather than the leader of a collective group of Saints living in pure love with one another. Community, diversity, nuance, and even sometimes consent<sup>5</sup> are lost in this simplistic narrative.

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5. “The revelation on marriage required that a wife give her consent before her husband could enter into plural marriage. Nevertheless, toward the end of the revelation, the Lord said that if the first wife ‘receive not this law’—the command to practice plural marriage—the husband would be ‘exempt from the law of Sarah,’ presumably the requirement that the husband gain the consent of the first wife before marrying additional women” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Plural Marriage in Kirkland and Nauvoo,” Oct. 2014, <https://www.lds.org/topics/plural-marriage-in-kirtland-and-nauvoo?lang=eng>).

I believe queer theology is ripe with possibilities to reconcile our diverse aspirations toward Zion in a model I call Queer Polygamy, a model that can accommodate a potentially infinite number of marital, sexual, romantic, platonic, and celestial relationships. The phrase *Queer Polygamy* almost seems redundant. Polygamy is inherently queer according to contemporary monogamous marital expectations.<sup>6</sup> It is, by Western standards, a deviation from the norm. The word *queer* may also seem to imply that a person must necessarily be a member of the LGBTQ+ community for these ideas to apply, but this is not the case. Rest assured, heterosexual monogamous couples are an important subset under the umbrella of Queer Polygamy, just as Brigham Young suggested. A person with many, one, or no spouses may be included in this model. The use of the word *queer* in Queer Polygamy is to signify a more thoughtful and thorough interpretation of polygamy that would be inclusive of such diversity, and many of its manifestations would be rightly considered queer. You may initially find this model strangely foreign, but I believe it is in harmony with LDS theology, both logically and practically, as both scripture and past prophets have taught. The word *polygamy* is used to convey the plurality of relationships we engage in and to suggest that celestial marriage and eternal sealings include far more practices than heterosexual monogamy or androcentric polygyny. Eternal sealings among the Saints are inherently plural. Queer Polygamy is not in opposition to LDS theology but rather the fulfillment of the all-inclusive breadth that LDS theology has to offer.

The Standard Model of polygamy is problematic for multiple reasons, as many LDS feminists and queer theologians, like myself, have

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6. In this paper I will use the word *queer* according to its broad definition as anything strange, peculiar, odd, or deviating from conventional norms or societal expectations. If I am using the word *queer* as a referent to the LGBTQ+ community, I will use *queer persons* or *queer community*.

pointed out.<sup>7</sup> I will review five of the most common problems with the Standard Model, then demonstrate how they might be reconciled by adopting the Queer Polygamy Model. The five common concerns are that the Stand Model does not leave room for the following: (1) monogamous couples; (2) women, and other genders, who desire plural marriage; (3) asexuals,<sup>8</sup> aromantics,<sup>9</sup> and singles; (4) homosexual relationships; and (5) plural parental sealings.

First, an unnuanced reading of Doctrine and Covenants section 132 appeals to a patriarchal and androcentric model of polygyny built upon a hierarchy of men who will be given women, also called virgins, as if they were property (D&C 132:61–63). This exclusively polygynous model is a major concern for women who do not wish to engage in plural marriage without their consent, such as the case with “the law of Sarah” (D&C 132:64–65). By extension, the Standard Model does not leave room for couples who wish to remain romantically and/or sexually monogamous. However, there is room for monogamy in the Queer Polygamy Model. To demonstrate this, I’d like to refer to queer sexual orientations not as universal orientations or socio-political identity labels but as specific practices in specific relationships. For example, I identify as pansexual; however, in my relationship with my sister I am asexual and aromantic. Though I am pansexual by orientation, I engage in a specific asexual, aromantic, platonic relationship with her. This is not intended to mean that our relationship is void of depth, intimacy, love, commitment, and loyalty—quite the contrary. I feel all those things for my sister and more, but we have no desire for a sexual or romantic connection. This does not mean my sister is any less important to me than my husband, with whom I do desire a sexual and romantic relationship; it simply means

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7. Blaire Ostler, “A Feminist’s Defense of Polygamy,” personal blog, Oct. 27, 2017, <https://www.blaireostler.com/journal/2016/10/21/a-feminists-defense-of-polygamy>; Blaire Ostler, “The Problem is Patriarchy, Not Polygamy,” personal blog, Feb. 5, 2018, [http://www.blaireostler.com/journal/2018/2/4/1akgw64pw\\_r3jgl4g0bbe1dg8hdj0wg](http://www.blaireostler.com/journal/2018/2/4/1akgw64pw_r3jgl4g0bbe1dg8hdj0wg).

the relationship dynamics are different between my sister and me and my husband and me. In the Queer Polygamy Model, I could be sealed to my sister in a platonic sealing for all eternity while also being sealed to my husband in a relationship that does include sex. I would be sealed to two people plurally, but I would still be practicing sexual monogamy. Thus, for couples who desire to practice heterosexual monogamy with one partner for all eternity, they may still be sealed to other persons they love plurally and engage in those other relationships asexually and aromantically. It is in this way that we can be sealed to our children. I am not only sealed to my husband, but I'm also platonically sealed to our three children. Not all sealings include sex, nor should they. Plural marriages, unions, and sealings among adults could also include plural, platonic sealings among several persons while the core couple still practices exclusive heterosexual monogamy.

Second, the account given in Doctrine and Covenants 132 does not explicitly address women who also wish to engage in plural marriages alongside their husbands. The exclusively polygynous model of polygamy can create a disturbing and problematic power imbalance among the sexes—especially for women in heterosexual relationships. Under the Queer Polygamy Model, plural sealings would be available to all consenting adults, not just men. As stated above, women are sealed to multiple people, such as children and parents, but I suggest that the policy allow women to be sealed to multiple adults whom they are not related to, just as men are afforded that privilege. Though the scriptures do not state that women may have more than one husband, that does not mean they *can't* have more than one husband. In fact, more than one of Joseph Smith's wives was also married to other men.<sup>8</sup> This shows

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8. "Several later documents suggest that several women who were already married to other men were, like Marinda Hyde, married or sealed to Joseph Smith. Available evidence indicates that some of these apparent polygynous/polyandrous marriages took place during the years covered by this journal. At least three of the women reportedly involved in these marriages—Patty Bartlett Sessions,

there is room in our religion for women who desire to be married to multiple men, including heteroromantic, sexual, or asexual relationships. It would be up to the participants to decide the relationship dynamics of their sealing or marriage, just as Joseph Smith engaged in sexual relationships with some, but not all, of his plural wives. There are various reasons for plural marriage and/or sealings that do or don't involve sex. Granted, legitimizing sexual relationships through sealings and/or ritual is important to avoid promiscuity in sexual relationships. Honesty and open communication are key to respecting the autonomy and volition of all participants—though not all past participants of polygamy practiced it in such a manner, namely Joseph Smith.

Third, a traditional interpretation of the doctrine of celestial marriage does not leave room for persons who do not desire marriage or are asexual and/or aromantic. However, there is room for asexual and

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Ruth Vose Sayers, and Sylvia Porter Lyon—are mentioned in the journal, though in contexts very much removed from plural marriage. Even fewer sources are extant for these complex relationships than are available for Smith's marriages to unmarried women, and Smith's revelations are silent on them. Having surveyed the available sources, historian Richard L. Bushman concludes that these polyandrous marriages—and perhaps other plural marriages of Joseph Smith—were primarily a means of binding other families to his for the spiritual benefit and mutual salvation of all involved” (“Nauvoo Journals, December 1841–April 1843,” introduction to *Journals: Volume 2*, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/doc/introduction-to-journals-volume-2>). “Another theory is that Joseph married polyandrously when the marriage was unhappy. If this were true, it would have been easy for the woman to divorce her husband, then marry Smith. But none of these women did so; some of them stayed with their ‘first husbands’ until death. In the case of Zina Huntington Jacobs and Henry Jacobs—often used as an example of Smith Marrying a woman whose marriage was unhappy—the Mormon leader married her just seven months after she married Jacobs and then she stayed for years after Smith's death. Then the separation was forced when Brigham Young (who had married Zina polyandrously in the Nauvoo temple) sent Jacobs on a mission to England and began living with Zina himself” (Todd Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997], 15–16).



aromantic sealings under the Queer Polygamy Model. Sealings of kinship, friendship, and love may be offered between persons who wish not to have a sexual or romantic relationship with others. Plural marriage for asexual persons could take the form of an asexual woman married to a heterosexual couple, or three asexual persons who wish to be sealed together in a plural marriage that doesn't include sex. Again, sealing and/or marriage is not tantamount to sex. Asexual persons, or persons who wish to remain single, could be sealed to parents, siblings, friends, and other partners without committing to sexualized or romanticized notions of marriage and sealings.

Fourth, the Standard Model is aesthetically heteronormative—leaving out the experiences and desires for homosexual, bisexual, pansexual, and other queer persons. This may be one of the more difficult huddles to overcome, because the common perception of Mormon theology implies there is no such room for homosexual unions in celestial cosmology. I do not see why this must necessarily be the case. I have written several pieces about how we could reenvision our reductive views of creation to include homosexual relationships, creation, reproduction, procreation, and families.<sup>9</sup> In my view, homo-interactive creation, which includes homosexuality, is a required aspect of godly creation. If there is anything evolutionary biology has taught us, it's that the creation of life and flourishing of the human species is far greater than heterosexual monogamy. I have no reason to think that God wouldn't use natural

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9. Blaire Ostler, "Sexuality and Procreation," personal blog, Feb. 22, 2016, <https://www.blaireostler.com/journal/2016/3/22/broadening-our-understanding-of-sexuality-and-procreation>; Blaire Ostler, "Queer Mormon and Transhuman: Part I," personal blog, Dec. 8, 2016, <https://www.blaireostler.com/journal/2016/12/8/queer-mormon-and-transhuman-part-i>; Blaire Ostler, "Queer Mormon and Transhuman: Part I," personal blog, Jan. 26, 2017, <https://www.blaireostler.com/journal/2017/1/26/queer-mormon-and-transhuman-part-ii>; Blaire Ostler, "Queer Mormon and Transhuman: Part I," personal blog, Aug. 24, 2017, <https://www.blaireostler.com/journal/2017/8/24/queer-mormon-and-transhuman-part-iii>.

means of creation to enable all life, goodness, relationships, parenting, and flourishing. If this is the case, it is possible for plural homosexual relationships to exist under the model of Queer Polygamy.

The Queer Polygamy Model leaves room for same-gender and same-sex sealings, whether they are platonic, such as with my sister and me, or homosexual, such as with two wives. Under the Queer Polygamy Model, plural marriage may include multi-gendered partnerships, such as sealings among sister wives that may or may not allow sexual relations between them. If a man is married to two women and the women are bisexual, they may choose to be sealed to each other and have a romantic and sexual relationship with each other as well as with their common husband. Likewise, a transgender woman might be married to a cisgender man and cisgender woman. If all identify as pansexual, it could be the case that they are all in a romantic and sexual relationship with one another. The takeaway is that gender is irrelevant to whether or not there is sexual activity in plural sealings—assuming there is no abuse, neglect, or harm being done to the participants. The purpose of the sealing isn't to legitimize sexual behavior; the purpose of sealing is to legitimize the eternal and everlasting bonds that people share with one another, be they homosexual or otherwise.

Fifth, the Standard Model doesn't leave room for children to have autonomy to be sealed or unsealed to diverse parents. In the Standard Model, children are property of their fathers and have little say about whether or not they may be sealed or unsealed to other parents. For example, a child born into a heterosexual marriage may be sealed to the parents, but if the father is gay, divorces his wife, and both marry other men, the child of the first marriage would have four parents—one biological father, one biological mother, and two stepfathers—but would only be sealed to the biological father and mother. Under the Queer Polygamy Model, the children could be granted plural sealings to both the biological parents and their husbands. The child would be sealed to three fathers and one mother, though the dynamics of the

relationships are diverse and fluid among the parents. Essentially a child should be able to be sealed to all the parents they love. This is not the case under the Standard Model, which focuses on who the child belongs to in the eternities instead of whom the child desires to be sealed to. A child should not be forced to choose between fathers by mandates of heterosexual monogamy or patriarchal polygyny. Children with plural parents should be granted plural sealings for those who desire them. No child should have to divorce a parent eternally just to be sealed to another, just as no wife should necessarily have to divorce a husband to be sealed to a second. It is to the detriment of the child to assume they are inherently “owned” by their biological father alone when the child has the capacity to love more than one father and mother. Likewise, a child born to a family with three mothers and one father should have the opportunity to be sealed to all her mothers. Heaven isn’t heaven without all the people we love, and I trust God feels the same. If not, heaven becomes hell.

Now that we have a broader understanding of what diverse families and sealings could look like under the Queer Polygamy Model, the words of LDS prophets about families begin to taste sweet again. The family really is central to God’s plan—it is ordained of God. We are all part of one big family—God’s family. The family is far more than just one mom and dad. It is siblings, cousins, spouses, aunts, uncles, friends, grandparents, and the generations of persons who came here before you or me. The family is about creating bonds that extend into eternity as we connect with one another to become something greater than ourselves. Family is everything, yet too often people perceive family to mean something so narrowly defined. It is really a grand and beautiful quilt that envelops us all. Sealings under this broad quilt might include, but are not limited to, spouse-to-spouse sealings, parent-to-child sealings, law of adoption sealings, friendship sealings, and many more. Under the family quilt of Queer Polygamy, we are all interconnected in an infinite number of complex and beautiful relationships.

The spirit of polygamy is love of community. This is the law we must embrace as Saints in Zion if we are to become gods. The spirit of polygamy encompasses the diverse unions of the gods in all their complexity and intricacies. The spirit of polygamy includes, but also reaches beyond, the legitimization of sexual relationships. The spirit of polygamy means I might be sealed to my best friend regardless of whether or not we also share a sexual relationship. It means children may be sealed to all their fathers and mothers, be they biological or adoptive. It means it takes a village to raise our children. It means I may be sealed to a sister wife, not through my husband but with my husband. It means my husband may be sealed to his best friend while they enjoy a platonic, asexual, aromantic relationship. It means an asexual woman may choose to be sealed with a gay couple, independent of sexual activity, but still have a relationship full of meaning, emotional intimacy, and purpose. The spirit of polygamy means heaven isn't heaven without all the people we love. It means infinite possibilities fulfilled by our infinite love—just like the gods, filled with a multiplicity of heavenly mothers, fathers, and parents that we have yet to imagine. I cannot imagine any God more beautifully Mormon than a God of both plurality and unity who welcomes all families into Zion as we strive to join the gods above.



Emily Fox King  
"Mother's Day"  
oil on canvas, 60" x 48"

# LDS WOMEN'S AUTHORITY AND THE TEMPLE: A FEMINIST FHE<sup>1</sup> DISCUSSION WITH MAXINE HANKS

Provo, Utah, February 25, 2019  
(excerpted and edited for length and clarity)

*Editor's note: The following is taken from a Q&A discussion that followed a presentation on "LDS Women and the Temple in Historical Context." The text of the presentation will appear on the Dialogue website.*

DIALOGUE: It's a rare pleasure to get together with Maxine Hanks for a private discussion about the place of women in the LDS Church. She has done research and writing in Mormon studies for a long time, and she's been standing on the front lines of Mormon feminism for more than three decades. I know you all—as Mormon feminists—have questions for her about feminist issues in the Church, and her thoughts about the temple. I also asked her to share some of her personal journey with us.

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1. Feminist FHE (Family Home Evening), first organized in Provo, Utah in 2012, by Hannah Wheelwright, and restarted in 2017 by Tinesha Zandamela, is a group of young Mormon Feminists that meets and talks about the intersections between Mormonism and Feminism. Since its founding, the group has spread to other locations. Current Feminist FHE (Provo) organizers include Laurie Batschi, Halli Bowman, Sydney Bright, Mallory Matheson, Jenna Rakuita, Rebecca Russavage, Charlotte Schultz, and Olivia Whiteley.

MAXINE: Thanks, I'm happy to answer any questions or discuss whatever topics you have in mind. First, to give some background, in 1992 I published a book about the history of Mormon feminism and women's relationship to priesthood and theology.<sup>2</sup> I found feminist voices from the beginnings of the Church to the present; women like Emma Hale Smith, Eliza R. Snow, and Emmeline B. Wells were talking about their own authority independent of men's, and their own relationship to priesthood. I used women's writings from the *Nauvoo Relief Society Minutes*, the *Woman's Exponent*, *Exponent II*, *Relief Society Magazine*, *Mormons for ERA*, *Algie Ballif Forum*, *Mormon Women's Forum*, *Voice club at BYU*, and other sources. I republished a few feminist articles and asked feminist scholars to write new articles about LDS women's history and theology for the book. I also interviewed women and men to collect their experiences with the divine feminine.

So, it was a lot of new and bold feminist research in one book at a time when most Mormons didn't even use the word "feminist" in public. The result was that five of my writers and myself faced Church discipline; four of us were in the September Six.<sup>3</sup> We lost our Church membership, but we knew that was the risk and the price for publishing feminist work that questioned traditional or institutional views at that time.

Today all that information is mainstream on the internet, often used or cited by LDS historians, scholars, and members. So, nineteen years later, I came back to the Church in 2012. I felt compelled to do

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2. Maxine Hanks, *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), available at <http://signaturebookslibrary.org/840/>.

3. Contributors to the book who were excommunicated: Maxine Hanks, Michael Quinn, Lavina F. Anderson in 1993; Janice M. Allred in 1995 and Margaret M. Toscano in 2000; Lynne K. Whitesides was disfellowshipped in 1993. The September Six were six scholars and feminists all disciplined in 1993.

that for my own healing, as a feminist historian and theologian in the Church. I wanted to foster belonging for myself and others who've been silenced or disciplined for feminism or scholarly work.

I didn't recant anything I'd said or written in the past or change my feminist views or work. I simply wanted to restore my membership, as I am. Obviously, I had help from supportive Church leaders. It was one of the best decisions of my life. This week is the seventh anniversary of my rebaptism. It's been extremely healing and allowed me to explore a new territory of faith and ministry.

In the 1990s, we were navigating new territory by publishing Mormon feminist history and theology. We were talking about women's relationship to priesthood in public; yet we couldn't do that without danger of Church discipline then. Today it's commonplace to talk about women's priesthood and theology in public; everyone is doing it. I'm not saying it's entirely safe, and some feminists still encounter leaders who try to silence or discipline them. Yet Mormon feminism is now understood as inherent in our history and culture. It's normal, mainstream.

Now, I find myself sharing women's history and theology in Church as a temple-going member because we realize that women's theology has been there the whole time, embedded in Mormon origins. You can read it in the original Relief Society Minutes and other historic feminist writings on the Church web site. Today, members want more information about women's history and theology. My ward asked me to share research about women's relationship to priesthood. I see tremendous positive change and hunger for women's theology. I anticipate more feminist work and healing in the Church to come. I've seen major changes in my lifetime. I know that policy can shift dramatically.

For example, when I was young, I wanted to be a missionary, but women were told not to apply, so I had to push and wait for approval to submit my application in June 1978. A few days later, the Church



announced a revelation extending priesthood to black members. It was so sudden, so huge, it blew our minds and changed the Church overnight. I remember wondering if women might someday get the priesthood too. I entered the missionary home in Salt Lake just before October General Conference in 1978, where I voted with thousands of members to accept priesthood ordination for black men and extend all priesthood and temple blessings to black women.

That same week I first received my endowment in the Salt Lake temple, before leaving to serve a mission in the South where I worked in black neighborhoods. So the Church voted to lift the priesthood ban against blacks one week before I went to teach in black homes. My first experience on arrival in the mission was the baptism of a black woman. The meaning of that event was enormous, knowing she could have all the blessings, rites, and ordinances of the Church.

Fast forward to October 2013, a year after my rebaptism in the Church. I returned to the Salt Lake temple for the first time since October conference of 1978, a span of thirty-five years. Coincidentally, it was October General Conference weekend again, in 2013. It was also the same weekend that Ordain Women held their first action on Temple Square. Many of my close friends were involved in that event. I was supportive of them in many ways, yet my place was in the temple that weekend rather than on Temple Square.

When I went through the endowment that day in October 2013, a black man filled the role of Jehovah, and he also took me through the veil. So, for me that day, God was black. It was extraordinary, realizing that in 1978 there were no black people in the temple, but in 2013, God was black. Afterward, I called Darius Gray to tell him about it, and we both cried. For me, the shift in my temple experience between October 1978 and October 2013 signified a major healing in the Church. And, I thought that day, if God can be black in the temple, surely God can be female there, as well.

Being in the temple that day coincided with an historic call for women's ordination outside. It was a watershed moment, a shift in Church consciousness about priesthood, like the change in 1978. Feminists on Temple Square were seeking priesthood and reclaiming the word "ordain"—because historically LDS women had possessed both. Women had received five or six kinds of ordinations from 1830–50—in ministry, the Relief Society, and the temple. Yet yet in LDS tradition those were female priesthood offices, women's own line of authority. That weekend, I felt my place was inside the temple recovering my ordinations. It was an example of how we each have our own unique role or place to be. I found empowerment privately in the temple by seeking my endowment, while my friends on Temple Square found empowerment publicly by seeking entrance to priesthood meeting.

So that's enough background. I'd like to hear from you all—about your own path, where you're at, and how you feel about the temple or the Church.

FHE: I'm impressed that you find the temple empowering as a feminist. Can you elaborate more on how you find it empowering, personally?

MAXINE: Sure, when I first entered the temple in 1978, I was surprised to discover that it wasn't about marriage. All the men were sitting on one side, and all the women were sitting on the other side, rather than in couples. So, I didn't feel awkward being single. That was a big deal in the 1970s, given the intense pressures to be married and have kids. I was trying to find out who I was, independent of marriage. The temple ceremony was about our individual relationship with God, not about couples. It was about my own path to God, not marriage. It was my own initiation into sacred rites. I was thrilled by all of that. I never saw the temple ceremonies through the lens of marriage or being dependent on a husband. I received the initiatory and endowment

feeling empowered and consecrated to God, not inadequate or incomplete in any way. I didn't pay attention to the one or two brief references about a husband because they didn't apply to me nor to the ceremony. The initiatory and endowment are inductions into priesthood and your own ascent to God. That's empowering.

I had a spiritual experience about priesthood in the temple, my first time in 1978. When I was "set apart" as a missionary, I felt something tangible conferred on me, a spiritual authority or mantle that stayed with me throughout my mission experience. However, when I went through the initiatory and endowment in the temple, I felt a bigger spiritual mantle descend on me, of the priesthood. I had no idea what type of priesthood it was, but I knew spiritually that I had just received priesthood in some form. I had no historical knowledge of that idea in 1978, it was only a spiritual sense, yet I knew it was real. And that sense of priesthood stayed with me all through my mission, and beyond. It gave me confidence and ability to minister, with power. In fact, my experience in the temple that day in 1978 drove me to research women's priesthood and theology in the 1980s.

Today, I love the symbolism of the ritual, the spiritual and esoteric meanings. The endowment is a rite of redemption, a sacred pattern of salvation—about the soul's descent from the realm of God, its awakening within the fallen world, and its ascent back to heaven. This is the archetypal journey of the soul, to discover its true self or nature, the "hero's journey" through departure, testing, and return. It feels ancient, like entering a mystery rite in a temple from another time. I love the initiation rites and white vestments of temple priesthood. I see them as ordination rites into "highest and holiest priesthood," and the fullness or "pleroma" of the Gods.

I see the endowment as an inspired midrash of Genesis that finishes or completes the theological story of Adam and Eve. It redeems them from the Fall via *gnosis* or spiritual knowledge of their divine identity,

which returns them to God's presence. It also redeems us, the human family, along with Adam and Eve, via knowledge of our true identity as divine beings, co-eternal with God, which brings us into communion with God. I see Adam and Eve as theological beings. They emerge from an androgynous being of clay, "Adamah" whom God divides into male and female humans, Adam (man) and Havah (life) before they fall into mortality. They are archetypal figures representing duality—male and female, masculine and feminine, physical and spiritual, mortal and eternal aspects of human being. The temple rites unite men and women in rituals that integrate the masculine and feminine and resolve duality into unity. On a literal level it joins couples in sacred marriage. On a theological level it returns the fallen human to heaven, marries the genders, mends duality, unites the mortal and eternal, reunites our souls with God. On a psychological level it symbolizes the integration of parts of Self into wholeness, masculine and feminine, conscious and unconscious the alchemical marriage of self, or "individuation."

FHE: You talked about how you're in the Church, you left for a long period then came back and there was something different. Where I'm at right now, I have historical background and knowledge, and personal experience through feminism, that I know is true, but I know that the Church is not there. Every time I go to church, it's just like this pain—it hurts, that tension I always feel. It's not like I want to leave the Church, but it's so hard to be there and see where we could be yet where we are. Could you speak to what was different exactly that second time, of being back in the Church, and how you deal with those tensions?

MAXINE: Yes, I wrestled with that dilemma for years before I returned. Could I really go back or not? I had a whole list of things I didn't agree with or didn't support. Then, I had a spiritual sense of reassurance that it would all work out okay because it was simple—"you need them, and they need you."

It's been better than I imagined. It works because I find a spiritual connection or resonance with members seeking God in our lives. Sure, we sometimes have different views on theology or doctrine or history, but that's true at a scholarly conference or a family reunion. I don't expect anyone to hold my view. I don't go to church for shared ideology, I go for the shared spiritual experience of a group of souls gathered to pray and seek God's love, light, inspiration. That works.

Also, returning works because *enough* had changed to create a new relationship. I didn't go *back* to something I left behind, I went forward to something new. In twenty years' time, I evolved and so did the Church: everything had changed. The Church is now publishing topics and materials that caused my exit—women's feminist history and theology are online and in new books. Compared to 1993, this is Camelot. BYU offers feminist classes with theories and topics that Cecelia K. Farr and Gail Houston were fired for teaching, even a minor in women's studies. BYU professors and LDS leaders share views that were once feminist and talk about women's priesthood in public. There are still points of disagreement between my views and Church curriculum or policies, but those our opportunities to work on our relationship. However, today I find a higher degree of compatibility with the Church than before, which is encouraging.

I feel empathy for your dilemma—feeling pained or alien at church. There are days when I can't avoid the distance between my view and theirs. So I focus on our bond as human beings, our shared spiritual struggles. That dissolves the social gaps. We're all God's children seeking our true home. Belonging can be situational depending on your ward and leaders. Yet I think one key to belonging is your own empowerment, within. That's not something anybody can give you or take away. It's your connection to God. Every person who tries to shut you down is an opportunity to strengthen your connection to God.

It's also an opportunity to practice ministry, by addressing others' fears. One day, I was quoting from the "Doctrine of Inclusion" in Relief Society and a sister objected to my sharing something secular. I explained that it was Elder Ballard's talk in the 2001 *Ensign*, and she was truly grateful to know about it. Another time, I was teaching the Young Women about Miriam, Moses, and Aaron as the three prophets who led Israel together. The bishop looked doubtful and worried, so I read Exodus 15:20–21, Micah 6:4, and Numbers 12:1–8, which consoled him. The young women loved it, they were saying, "Miriam was a prophet? That's so cool!" It empowered them.

FHE: In the Doctrine and Covenants, it seems like Joseph Smith in certain places asserted his ultimate authority to quell attempts at receiving revelation from people who weren't the prophet. You seem to view him as someone who wanted his authority checked or balanced by other leaders. Do you think that's a more accurate view of him than this authoritarian version of him in scriptures?

MAXINE: I see both sides of Joseph—the authoritarian and egalitarian; they both show up in his relationships and leadership, and his dictation of scriptures. Everything is filtered through his personality, his lens. Some passages in the D&C speak in ominous patriarchal authoritarian voice and other passages speak with a sublime spiritual quality of wisdom. Section 132 reflects the best and worst of Joseph's prophetic voice—it asserts his authority over Emma and threatens her with destruction if she doesn't practice polygamy, yet it envisions a true equality of Gods, the equal exaltation of men and women in heaven.

Joseph radically empowered women in ministry and priesthood, yet disempowered or harmed women in polygamy. I see both as real. Regarding who gets to receive revelations—in D&C 28, Joseph appeals to that story in Numbers 12 that I was teaching the Young

Women—about God appearing to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. They're all prophets, but Moses has a different relationship: "With him I speak face to face clearly." This definition of prophetic role is invoked in D&C 28:2–3, and D&C 8 to answer the question of who gets to receive revelation. Joseph's revelations are saying that we all have visionary or prophetic potential but we each have different callings, offices, and abilities.

Anyway, I recognize both sides of Joseph, positive and negative, the inspired and tragically flawed. It's not realistic to choose one extreme, saying Joseph was only an abuser, or always pious. There's evidence for both, but neither is the sum total of him. Joseph had higher visions of life and people that lifted them to new heights; yet he also harmed people. We need to see both sides, I think.

FHE: We got a new stake president and they invited him and his wife to speak. They didn't allot specific time to either. His wife took two minutes and he took twenty. I had this thought "Why are you sitting down? Take your time." It was her decision. There's no doubt there's this patriarchal system, but we're half the problem I think, if we're not rising or claiming our own power.

MAXINE: I agree

FHE: I ask myself all the time—how do I feed into this patriarchal system? I think this has been indoctrinated in me since I was two. How do I, as a woman, claim *my* power, even if that system wasn't there? I don't know if I would rise to claim it.

MAXINE: That relates to empowerment, which I see as inner validity or authority. I call it the "inner ordination" from God, who loves you and gave you existence. Your validity comes from your own eternal

spirit. We peel back layers of social conditioning to discover we are divine beings of light—and how precious we are, how deserving to be ourselves and express our unique existence in this world. You have a divine right and responsibility to find your own voice and place. Validity is truly inner. Others can certify us with status, office or degrees, but where it happens is inside.

This is the lesson I learned outside of the Church. I took a path of ministry seeking ecclesiastical ordination, yet I found it in the solitary journey of self, alone with God. I experienced the inner spiritual ordination. Once you find that spiritual anointing or chrism or grace, you've got it and nobody can extinguish that, unless you let them. That's what enabled me to come back to Church and find my authentic space neither shut down nor driven out.

You don't have to leave the Church like I did, to find inner ordination—it's a private process, between you and God. It doesn't matter where you're located. Once you experience the inner chrism, you're empowered, regardless of what others do. The Gospel of Philip describes this beautifully—“when it is revealed, then the perfect light will flow out on every one. And all those who are in it will receive the chrism. . . . And none shall be able to torment a person like this, even while he dwells in the world. . . . The world has become the Aeon (eternal realm) . . . fullness for him . . . it is revealed to him alone.”<sup>4</sup>

This passage is talking about the mystery of the “bridal chamber” within us, where our soul discovers its oneness with God's divinity. That's what Joseph Smith was talking about in his King Follett sermon, and in the temple endowment—that when we discover God's spirit is like ours, we “ascend” to God. He said that was the whole purpose of

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4. *The Gospel of Philip*, translated by Wesley W. Isenberg in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, edited by James M. Robinson (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), 139–60; the text is available online at <http://gnosis.org/naghamm/gop.html>.



temple rites—our ascent. I think this unity of our spirit with God’s, or “bridal chamber,” is a higher meaning of the temple rites. The “celestial marriage” necessary for exaltation with God may be our own soul’s relationship or oneness with God. On a literal physical level, a sealing rite between two human beings at the altar is incredibly beautiful and real, sanctifying a relationship of soul mates. Yet it also has symbolic meaning about recovering your spiritual union with God, which is eternal and core to your being. You and God are made of the same uncreated light—“intelligence or the light of truth was not created or made” (D&C 93:29). So at the innermost level, you are married to God.

FHE: That really helps a lot, thank you. Ok, then how do you handle it when someone objects to the views you share or your way of participating?

MAXINE: I validate both sides, theirs and mine. There’s no fight when both sides are valid. We’re both children of God, I honor that, which allows us to be different. If someone has a problem with me, I talk with them to figure it out together. If that doesn’t work, I go home and pray for more insight, to see what I’m not seeing. Sometimes I’m prompted to hold my position, other times to concede. Conflict can relax when your refuge is found in God, not in approval from the other person. I try to find higher wisdom and listen, hear it.

FHE: I’m appalled that you were even excommunicated. I know it was a different time, but something I’ve been talking about with my roommates is that it still happens. Like that former bishop [Sam Young] who was excommunicated for publicizing the problem of sexual abuse. I find myself a little bit in fear of excommunication because my stake president has taught and made homophobic comments. So, in my own stake, in my own ward, I don’t feel safe to express myself. I feel like

there's so much inconsistency, depending on who your local leaders are, you can be excommunicated for anything. I don't want to keep reinforcing this patriarchal mess.

MAXINE: That's an awful place to be in, that fear of discipline; it's not fair or healthy. You don't want to feed into that dynamic of fear. How do we break out of that? We change the dynamic from fear to compassion. We stop seeing each other as the enemy; in reality we're spiritual siblings, and we need each other. That was the shift I made between 1993 and 2012. I changed my view of male leaders, which in 1993 was polarized. I lacked compassion for them, I thought they were the enemy. Seven years later, when working together on the Olympics, I realized they weren't the enemy—they were my brothers. That radically changed our relationship to a far more realistic and positive one.

This came up recently with Gina Colvin in New Zealand. She and her bishop got into a polarized tension that felt unsolvable, and excommunication seemed unavoidable. Then it completely reversed at the last minute. She did deep soul searching and praying, while hundreds of friends wrote letters to her stake president and bishop. Their perspective of Gina shifted to realizing she wasn't the enemy—she needed their support. They told her, "We should be building a bridge with you, not a wall." The discipline dissolved.

It's a whole different narrative to find an unexpected bridge between feminists and male leaders. It reminds me of that scene from *Indiana Jones*, where he has to step into an abyss, relying only on faith that he won't fall—then suddenly an unseen bridge appears. There's an invisible bridge hiding between us and the opposite side. It's Christ, the true mediator. If we pray for His help, an invisible bridge may appear. A bridge doesn't mean you give in, go along with the other side. You have to find your own position first, you can't find a middle ground or a bridge without both sides holding their own ground. Then, in that

tension between two different places, a bridge can appear—if you’re both seeking a vision beyond your own positions. When I returned to the Church, my leaders and I were in unknown territory, wondering how do we do this? We both turned it over to Christ and the invisible bridge appeared. That’s the best answer I have for the fear between feminists and leaders.

FHE: What do you think is the best way to communicate frustrations to the Quorum of Twelve or the First Presidency—the decision makers—in a way that won’t turn them off or invalidate your own voice, but that actually inspires changes? We have these conversations only in small, very safe groups, with people who think like us. I am pained by not seeing Heavenly Mother in the temple and I’ve talked to many people who have that same pain.

MAXINE: I feel that pain too, every time I’m in the temple.

FHE: What do you think is the most effective way to communicate that there is a large sector of the church population that has that frustration? Are the decisions makers aware of how widespread our frustration is on that, or other issues?

MAXINE: Leaders in Relief Society, the Quorum of Apostles, and Public Affairs are all listening to women, including feminists, they’re hyper-aware of women’s concerns and complaints, and using that info for positive changes, which will continue. Public voices are noticed, read, considered. They also pay attention to private letters; they read their mail and often respond. I didn’t learn that until 2012.

How can you be heard without taking it so far you are alienating? Since they are paying attention, you don’t have to overstate or hammer your point. Just be honest and thoughtful, pray about it, and share

information they can use. You can simply record a podcast, write a blog, or an article—like our discussion tonight for *Dialogue*.

For example, when Lester Bush wrote an article in *Dialogue* about the exclusion of black members from priesthood, it was 1973, not a progressive time. Yet President Kimball read and studied that article; his copy of *Dialogue* was covered with red marks.<sup>5</sup> That article prompted him to pray about the topic, and he received a revelation, changing the Church policy about black members.

FHE: In my previous ward I was put on a do not ask to speak or teach list, which I didn't know until my current bishop told me about it. He called me to be a teacher for the *Saints* book, which I was so excited about. Anyway, this bishop shared with me experiences that he's had with Heavenly Mother in the temple.

MAXINE: What a great bishop.

FHE: He really is. Yet, there are many who abuse their power or are stuck in their white male privilege and have no idea what's happening in our lives.

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5. Rebecca England related this story to me on Nov. 13, 2018. "Jordan [Kimball, grandson of Spencer] and I found the marked-up Lester Bush article in SWK's copy of *Dialogue* when we were sorting through their house on Laird Dr. after Camilla's death. When he studied an article, SWK would underline in red pen or pencil—red underlining, meant he studied the article carefully. None of the other *Dialogues* or articles were marked up like that. We looked through all the *Dialogues* to see if any others were marked up similarly and none were except Lester Bush's article. So, it made a strong impression on both of us. This would have been about 1989. We mentioned this in a conversation in 2009 and Greg Prince followed up with questions. One of Jordan's cousins inherited the *Dialogue*."

MAXINE: That's a vestige of women's lost authority which male leaders subverted, starting with Brigham Young in 1845, then priesthood correlation in 1908–1970. Eliza R. Snow held onto female authority until her death in 1887. One of her last statements asserted “The Relief Society is designed to be a self-governing organization . . . to deal with its members . . . instead of troubling the Bishop.”<sup>6</sup> From Emma to Eliza to Emmeline, women were organized to work through the R.S., not through male leaders. It was a female line of authority from the ward to the top of the Church, where the Relief Society President and LDS President conferred. So, I don't see a solution, other than restoring the Relief Society's full authority.

FHE: I've been really trying to navigate this. I was open with my ministering brothers about all my struggles then I went to my bishop and I feel this fear, at the core—is God sexist? I know that in my communion with Him, He's not, and She's not, and They are not. I want to thank you for bringing in so much history and the spirit of our male and female Gods to show there is no sexism in the true plan of it all.

MAXINE: I really believe our history reveals a theology of gender equality, on all levels of the Church, from missionaries to ward and stake leaders, to the temple rites, to male apostles and female disciples. That blueprint of equality keeps me going.

FHE: Learning more about that gives me the strength to try to find my place. If you could share more of your experience of how to negotiate that equality—it seems like you have the inner ordination that you talked about. You gave me words for what I'm trying to find and

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6. Eliza R. Snow, “To the Branches of the Relief Society,” Sept. 12, 1884, *Woman's Exponent* 13, no. 8 (Sept. 15, 1884): 61.

trying to understand. I want to be a change maker in every part of my life, but I can't do that in the same way in the Church. Or, at least I don't know how to. Some of us live our lives at this higher level of equality so we're trying to bring the Church there. But how do I or how do you do that? What do you choose to say or not to say? Can you expound on that?

MAXINE: First, I remember that we're all learning and growing together. So, I pray for help and it comes. The best advice I can give is turn to God.

Also, you're a lay minister, every member is confirmed or "ordained" to the ministry, according to D&C 25. We're all co-ministering the ward and stake, so what we do affects many others. Too often we focus on what we lack, not seeing the power of our voice or participation. Being aware of your effect on others enables you to be a better minister.

Also, learning ministry skills is crucial, for every member and leader. I studied ministry and chaplaincy, to learn what it means to minister. It's not about trying to convert anyone, or provide any answers. Ministry is giving others support to find *their own* answers. It's listening to them and learning what they need in this moment. When you do that, you're ministering.

A minister is a facilitator for others to work through their struggles. You hold a safe space for them to dig deep, face fears, hard issues, private trials. If they aren't safe to deal with whatever comes up, that's not ministry—which is unconditional support to face life's hardest moments and not be alone. We all need someone to hold that space for us. You never know when you might be the only one who can do that for another person.

When *you* need ministering, choose someone you trust who will listen to your struggle and honor where you're at, not judge you or impose their views on you, but allow you to find your own break-

through. Ministry is knowing the difference, between our needs and others' needs, so we don't impose or transfer our views onto another, and we don't allow them to impose their views onto us.

FHE: One of the things I love about the changes in the temple was that it took things that I was not able to reconcile in my relationship with God and adjusted most of them. It's kind of confirming the relationship I have with my Heavenly Father. But it's also given me pause to wonder about the other side of that. I don't want to think that my relationship with God is what is right for the Church—or, that every thought I have is from the spirit or is doctrinal.

MAXINE: Yes, it's healthy to know the difference between your own personal path and the collective path of the Church, and not impose them on each other.

FHE: I know the answer to this is building a relationship with God and the spirit and learning how it's talking to you. Is there a time, an experience you could share when you went too far, or realized that there was a boundary?

MAXINE: Yes, my excommunication. On one hand, I definitely felt divine guidance to compile the book, I felt aided by higher wisdom. On the other hand, I could have navigated the book's relationship to the Church more sensitively. I was out of sync with the Church, ignoring the chasm between my position and the Church status. It's important to recognize where the group as a whole is located, relative to where you are as an individual—and to deal with both, not just your own.

The freedom to follow your own path is a gift from God. It's crucial to listen to your soul and follow its call—don't shut it down. Yet that's

different from the group journey. The individual and the group each have their own developmental journey. Both deserve respect.

I was at odds with the Church in my twenties, thirties, and forties, but now I'm more in sync with it than I've ever been, which amazes me. Still, there are differences between my perspective and the Church's, which I honor. My interpretation of women's history and priesthood overlap a great deal with Church materials, yet they may never fully align. I honor my own work and inspiration by writing and publishing, and I honor the work of the Church by supporting its efforts to empower women.

FHE: Your work in the past, your research and writing received some backlash. I recently did some historical research on a difficult aspect of Church history and I started to get backlash from people at BYU about it and it made me a little afraid to continue with it. I was wondering how you continued with your work in face of external pressure and backlash against it?

MAXINE: I'm so sorry to hear that. Is it the department that's having a hard time, your professors?

FHE: No, it's peers.

MAXINE: It's often peers who put pressure on us, since they want us to be where they are. Are they more conservative than you are?

FHE: Yes.

MAXINE: That's hard. Peers can be intolerant sometimes. Backlash is often shadow projection and scapegoating, which can be destructive, harmful. It's wise to protect yourself; don't own projections. You're



the expert on you. Stay close to God, find others who support you, and stand firm in the truth of who you. Then just keep being you and doing your own work.

I try to heal the conflict via common ground. I look for areas where we agree, to build bridges, while allowing our differences. But if others' efforts are harmful or unethical it's time to stand firm, not compromise.

I get backlash from critics about my return to Church membership. Critics focus on the problems, harms, what's wrong with the Church. Seeing the Church's shadow is necessary, but it can go too far, consume you. I grew tired of talking about the problems long ago. I focus on the inspiring and empowering aspects of LDS theology and practice because that's where I prefer to work these days, that's where the life is.

FHE: You mentioned not depending on authorization from others. I've been thinking about that in the context of the temple changes and the role of revelation in the temple changes, or at least in the way the temple changes were released. What do you think of that intersection and how that plays into progression?

MAXINE: So, the intersection of revelation and change?

FHE: Yeah, with revelation, when it actually happens, or how a lot of women already have been living or believing these things prior to the "revelation" of these changes.

MAXINE: So, how do we view a new revelation, when it changes or reverses past policy that negatively shaped our lives, or didn't shape our lives because we didn't believe it?

FHE: Yes.

MAXINE: Should we base our beliefs and decisions on current teachings that may change? That's a crucial question in a Church that gives great authority to current revelation, teachings, and policies. The simple answer is—if a new revelation or teaching or policy is healthy and positive, it's worth supporting. Obviously, it's wise to choose teachings that resonate God's love, feed our souls and improve our lives, over teachings that harm lives or shut down souls. The burden of safety is on us, to discern true or good teachings from erroneous ones.

This returns to the question of who can receive revelation. Leaders receive inspiration for their Church callings. Members receive inspiration for their own lives. The responsibility for our decisions is ours and ours alone. Leaders have authority over Church functioning but not over members' lives. From an early age, I took my questions and decisions to God, rather than to my parents or to the Church. A few times, my parents or the Church were right, and I was wrong, but I made my own decisions. When I followed my own conscience, things went well, but when I followed others' advice against my intuition, I regretted it, majorly. When we give our decisions over to someone else, we lose our divine guidance.

FHE: As a follow-up comment, I approach things in a similar way. I study religious history, specifically the Reformation and I somewhat identify as a Reformation spiritualist—the institution isn't what is going to shape me, it's going to be my relationship with God and my understanding of theology.

MAXINE: Well, they both shape us, profoundly, but it's our decision how much we let the Church or God shape us. That means taking responsibility for our spiritual progression, as Joseph Smith envisioned and the endowment implies. LDS faith relies on revelation, both personal and institutional, in tension with each other. This tension

is always presenting itself. Church revelation leads one direction and your inspiration may lead another direction, until you're out of sync with the Church, and you have to decide how far you're willing to go.

I was willing to follow my own spiritual path outside the Church—that was my decision. Excommunication was a revelatory “shattering of the vessels” opening a doorway to new knowledge and realms I had never known, with overwhelming positive results. Likewise, my spiritual path back home to the Church was equally revelatory and transforming. I don't regret either path, at all. So, our relationship with God may take us out of sync with the Church, or back into sync with it—depending on where we feel God is calling us. I value both equally—my relationship with God and with the Church.

FHE: I have two very separate questions. My first question is, kind of touching on what was discussed before. I feel like I've sensed for a long time a kind of a benevolent sexism. How do you address that one, when your sex has kind of put you on a pedestal? And the perfectionism that goes with it, you know, is this weird thing.

MAXINE: Gender in the LDS Church is complex. The dual tendencies of sexism and feminism are in tension with each other in Church history and ministry. This requires separating the sexism from the feminism in our tradition.

Women's status in the Church reflects both tendencies of feminism and sexism. We have a gendered ministry, which can be experienced as feminist or sexist—depending on who's managing it. Female ministry that is defined and managed by women themselves is “difference feminism” (a focus on women's different needs as a gender). Yet when female ministry is defined and managed by men, that's sexism, patriarchy. If men uphold gendered spheres, then manage both male and

female spheres, that's sexism, patriarchy. Female identity is defined by women themselves.

LDS tradition has an empowering theological blueprint that combines both gendered and ungendered authority, both separate and inclusive ministry, which evoke both difference feminism and equality feminism (a focus on women's equality with men), in balance with male authority. This original blueprint placed women in parallel partnership with men, from the ward level to the top of the Church. Yet this theological gender balance has been obscured by organizational sexism accrued over time. Our blueprint of gender balance is skewed by male privilege, which diminishes the gender equality embedded in our theology.

Yet, the theological blueprint for equality envisioned by Joseph and Emma is still visible in the Church today. We have an ungendered lay ministry of men and women preaching, teaching, leading, and managing the congregation together. We have a gendered ministry of women and men working in separate spaces and authority for gendered mirroring and mentoring. We have an inclusive temple ministry that brings men's and women's gendered authority together in an inclusive priesthood order.

Women's gendered authority was established in 1830–44, via a series of "ordinations." In 1830, Emma Smith was "ordained" to lay ministry and high Church office of Elect Lady. [D & C 25] In 1842, the Relief Society presidency were "ordained" to "preside over the Society . . . just as the Presidency, preside over the church."<sup>7</sup> In 1843, women were "ordained" as a "Priestess to the Most high God" in the temple, and also "ordained" to the "fullness" or "highest & holiest order of the

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7. Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, Mar. 17, 1842, 7, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book/4>.

priesthood” in the temple.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, in 1850, Louisa B. Pratt was “ordained” a full-time missionary, which was an ungendered office.<sup>9</sup> Today, women leaders in the ward, the Relief Society, Young Women, Primary, and in the temple still have their own offices, authority, keys, revelation, and “setting apart” or ordination to lead the gendered ministry of the Church. These are ways women are ordained.

If women were ordained by men giving them Aaronic and Melchizedek orders and offices, women’s authority would come from men rather than from women’s connection to God. Our LDS tradition of female seers, visionaries, societies, ladies, presidents, counselors, boards, prophetesses, priestesses, and mother god arose from women’s own spirituality, inspiration, and innovations, as feminist theology. There is a hidden narrative within the dominant history of men’s authority, where women’s own relationship with God gave rise to their authority. Women shaped Mormon origins and development via their own spirituality and agency.<sup>10</sup> Lucy Mack, Emma Smith, Mary Whitmer, Eliza Snow, Sarah Kimball, Zina Young, Bathsheba Smith,

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8. Phinehas Richards diary, Jan. 22, 1846, LDS archives, and “Meetings of anointed Quorum [—] Journalizings,” Sept. 28, 1843, both cited in D. Michael Quinn, “Mormon Women Have Had the Priesthood Since 1843,” in Hanks, *Women and Authority*, 368, fn. 20, fn. 25.

9. George Ellsworth, ed., *The History of Louisa Barnes Pratt* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1998), 100-10, 128; available online at [https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/usupress\\_pubs/92/](https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/usupress_pubs/92/).

10. Maxine Hanks, “‘A Beautiful Order’—Revisiting Relief Society Origins,” LDS Church History Symposium, Mar. 3, 2016, session 3A; also Maxine Hanks, “Visionary Sisters and Seer Stones,” Sunstone Symposium, Kirtland, Ohio, 2015; also Ian Barber, “Mormon Women as Natural Seers: An Enduring Legacy” in Hanks, *Women and Authority*, 167–84. Also see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A House Full of Females: Plural Marriage and Women’s Rights in Early Mormonism, 1835–1870* (New York: Knopf, 2017).

Emmeline Wells all envisioned, organized, and led women's ministry. Joseph Smith didn't give them spiritual power—they had it themselves.

FHE: I do think it's a pretty consistent observation that benevolent patriarchy intrudes on us. Just all the pedestaling of women and overgeneralizations—like “my wife can do no wrong” or “women do everything better.” I feel like there are weird dynamics that feed into this, there's anxiety, and lack of recognition of women's reality.

MAXINE: Yes, the need to pedestalize and generalize women erases their individual voice, agency. Gender differences can't be generalized, and that's not the purpose of separate gendered space, which is to explore that gendered identity. Benevolent sexism claims to value female gender then co-opts it. Some feminists toss out gendered spheres altogether saying, ‘Men and women should have all the same options, just treat us all the same.’ Yet research shows that women and men need gendered space, as well as inclusive space, for growth. LDS Church ministry wisely uses both gendered and inclusive spaces, which provide balance.

On one level we have inclusive ministry and authority. Men and women both are confirmed to the lay ministry, then set apart or ordained to whatever callings, roles, or offices they receive. We have inclusive worship spaces—sacrament meeting, Sunday school, youth activities, stake and general conference, and the temple endowment where men and women receive the same vestments and rites, culminating in the celestial room, which brings everyone together.

On another level, we have gendered ministry and authority that focus on the needs of women or men as a group. Research on female development and education shows that women learn and perform better in female settings. Relief Society and the Young Women program provide gendered space for women to process female identity and ministry. The women's session of general conference does the same.

Also, the temple initiatory rites are sacred female space for consecrating women's personal relationship to God, which includes the Mother.

The Church provides both gendered and inclusive spaces for women's and men's spiritual development. However, some of our women's ministry and female spaces are under the direction of men—which erodes the purpose of gendered space. This is due largely to changes made by Brigham Young in 1845, when he asserted men's authority over women in the Relief Society and the temple— and we've been stuck there ever since.

FHE: Thanks for that explanation. My second question has to do with the positive outlook. We talked about President Kimball, his healing of the Church. I resonate with President Nelson bringing back some of the same kind of beautiful, prophetic, hopeful statements. How do you think changes in the temple, now and future, will potentially function with how women in the Church can have a more influential role in the growth and movement of the Church?

MAXINE: That's a big question and topic, because women's status in the temple is connected theologically and historically to women's status in the Church. Temple priesthood and Church ministry affect each other because the temple priesthood was the culmination of ministry and priesthood in the Church. Women's ministry began in 1830 and grew through stages in Kirtland 1833–36 and Nauvoo 1842–44, building upon itself until it culminated in temple priesthood 1843–44. We need a full recovery of women's 1830–44 ordinations and authority in the Church, along with a full recovery of women's ordination rites in the temple prior to 1845. Only that will complete the picture of women's original authority and its blueprint for equality and fullness.

Originally, in 1843–44, women were “anointed and ordained” to priesthood in the temple. For example, in 1843 Joseph and Emma were

“anoointed & ord[ained] to the highest & holiest order of the priesthood (& Companion) D[itt]o.”<sup>11</sup> In 1844, Heber and Vilate Kimball were both anoointed and ordained as “Prest and Prestest unto our God.”<sup>12</sup> Likewise Eliza R. Snow reported that women were made “priestesses unto the most high God.”<sup>13</sup>

However, in January 1846, this ordination rite was drastically changed by Brigham Young and re-administered to couples who had received the original rites under Joseph Smith. Brigham Young re-anoointed Heber C. Kimball, “a king and a priest unto the most high God” but re-anoointed Heber’s wife Vilate “a queen and priestess unto her husband” with all blessings “in common with her husband.”<sup>14</sup> Likewise Brigham Young was re-anoointed “a king and a priest unto the most high God” while his wife Mary Ann was re-anoointed “a queen and priestess unto thine husband” and “inasmuch as thou dost obey his counsel” would receive “exaltation in his exaltation.”<sup>15</sup>

This catastrophic change removed women’s direct personal relationship with God, and subordinated women’s priesthood under her husband’s. Women were no longer a priestess to God, but a priestess to their husband, exalted through him, not through God. Women’s

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11. Joseph Smith, Diary, Sept. 28, 1843, LDS Church Archives; Meetings of the Anointed Quorum, Sept. 28, 1843, both cited in Devery S. Anderson and Gary James Bergera, eds., *Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed 1842–1845: A Documentary History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2005), 25–26.

12. Anderson and Bergera, eds., *Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed*, 54.

13. Eliza R. Snow, “An Address,” *Woman’s Exponent*, 2 (Sept. 15, 1873): 62.

14. First entry in the “Book of Anointings,” Jan. 8, 1846, quoted in David John Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (San Francisco, Calif.: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 87–88.

15. “Book of Anointings,” Jan. 11, 1846, quoted in Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness*, 88–90.



own authority as “priestesses to the most high God” was erased. Also gone was women’s direct unmediated relationship with God.

This temple change in 1846 was only part of a larger diminishment and erasure of women’s authority and priesthood that occurred immediately after Joseph Smith’s death in 1844. Brigham Young erased women’s independent authority and priesthood in both the Relief Society in 1845 and the temple in 1846, subverting both under men’s authority and priesthood.

Women had been “ordained” not only in the temple, but also ordained in the Relief Society. The Relief Society president was a prophetess with keys to receive revelation for the women and their organizations. This included revelation about the Divine Mother, as Eliza R. Snow received in October 1845. Joseph Smith didn’t articulate much about female orders or offices or theology of the Mother, because he left those tasks to the women themselves. Joseph turned the key of revelation over to female leaders to receive their own direction from God to define women’s priesthood order and offices.<sup>16</sup>

It might be the ultimate patriarchal act if men claimed revelation from the Mother to define female theology. I think it shows great wisdom that male leaders haven’t done that. In 1991, President Hinckley admitted that regarding the Mother in Heaven, he could find no precedent for prayers to “her of whom we have no revealed

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16. “He spoke of delivering the *keys* to this Society . . . I now turn the *key* to you in the name of God . . . and intelligence shall flow down from this time” (Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, Apr. 28, 1842, 36–37, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book/1#full-transcript>).

“Those ordain’d to lead the Society, are authoriz’d to appoint to different offices as the circumstances shall require” (Nauvoo Relief Society Minute Book, 8, 38, 40, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/nauvoo-relief-society-minute-book/1#historical-intro>).

knowledge.”<sup>17</sup> I remember thinking what an honest confession that was from a leader of a worldwide religion—no knowledge of our divine Mother? I saw his admission as an opening for female leaders to receive revelation from Her.

Today in 2019, new changes to the temple ceremony are beginning to address and reverse the historical loss of women’s direct connection to God. We have been waiting for this needed correction since 1845–46. Today in the temple, instead of men and women making different covenants (men to “God” and women to “husband”) they make the same covenants and they both make their covenants directly with God. No longer are women queens and priestesses their husbands; now they are queens and priestesses in the new and everlasting covenant, which refers to the fullness of priesthood and gospel—not to marriage.<sup>18</sup>

This change recovers women’s parallel status with men from their subordination under male authority, and it restores women’s direct unmediated relationship with God. This is a momentous and welcome change. It corrects women’s loss of authority—to a degree. However, it doesn’t restore their full ordination as a “priestess to God” nor the full individuality of their priesthood. We have yet to recover women’s original and independent authority in both the temple and the Relief Society, and to yet discover the fullness of both.

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17. “I have looked in vain for any instance [of] a prayer to ‘our Mother in Heaven . . . I may add that none of us can add to or diminish the glory of her of whom we have no revealed knowledge” (Gordon B. Hinckley, “Daughters of God,” Gordon B. Hinckley address, Oct. 1991, <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/1991/10/daughters-of-god?lang=eng>).

18. “*The new and everlasting covenant is the sum total of all gospel covenants and obligations. . . . Marriage is not the new and everlasting covenant’ . . . This covenant includes all ordinances of the gospel*” (Boyd K. Packer, *The Holy Temple* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980], 158; Packer is here citing Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 1 [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954], 156).

However, this change is an enormous move in the right direction. The restoral of women's original rites and ordination to priesthood in the temple could reverberate onto women's preparatory ministry in the Church—the Relief Society, and Young Women—encouraging a full restoration and articulation of our historic female ministry and ordination. The keys, ordinations, orders, and offices of Relief Society and Young Women could return from the pages of our history, along with women's sacred rites and ordinances, including blessings and healings. Perhaps we could also recover the presence of our Mother in the temple, the female Elohim. We have an extraordinary women's ministry of theological equality that has survived and is still functioning—even though perhaps not fully self-aware, named, or articulated, and not fully enacted or empowered, yet.

FHE: Amen. Can I say thank you for fighting for us, for paving the way? Thank you for coming back. I feel inspired by your example and your spirit. I'm interested in your faith transition and progression. It doesn't seem like you ever lost faith in God or in Christianity or the restoration, even. How was that in your twenty years away? And do you think there's a spot in Mormonism for just cultural Mormonism?

MAXINE: Yes, there are countless people who are inactive LDS yet still identify as part of the "Mormon" tradition culturally or ethnically. I think there's space in Mormon culture to be whoever or wherever you are in the Mormon journey.

Actually, I went through a journey of extremes, beginning on my mission in the 1970s, then going inactive from Church in the 1980s, then publishing my book and leaving the Church in the 1990s, then finding oneness with God in the 2000s, then returning LDS in the 2010s. Each decade held a new paradigm. I went through many stages including atheism, agnosticism, gnosticism, and mysticism, which

taught me to find my own light in the face of emptiness and darkness. It was gnostic Christianity where I found my inner spiritual core; and in the Christian liturgical year, I found my spiritual formation path. I found oneness with God, exactly as Joseph Smith described it in the King Follett sermon. Then I felt spiritually called to come back to the LDS Church and bring everything I'd learned, to see if I could integrate it all, somehow. I thought, "thanks a lot God, that's a big job," but I'm back, and trying to integrate it.

Long story short, I honor everyone's journey of the soul. Nobody can tell you how it's supposed to go; the map is within you. All you can do is try to listen to your highest most reliable guidance and see where it takes you. My path gave me what I was looking for, everything I wanted and needed. It transformed me. I would not have been able to come back and do what I'm doing now if I hadn't taken that journey. And it's not over, the inner path is still moving me forward into new knowledge and larger vistas, every year.

**DIALOGUE:** Thank you everyone for this great conversation. Before our closing prayer, I have a couple of final questions. One is, if you could go back and talk to the young feminist Maxine—trying to navigate and come to terms with her religious community and spiritual self—what would you tell her? The other is, what other changes do you see happening that you're inspired by or excited about in the Church?

**MAXINE:** I would tell her, don't doubt yourself, have confidence in your work, you're on the right path, go for it. You deserve the best things in life, college degrees, a career, a great husband. Do not diminish yourself.

What am I excited about? All the new women's history coming from the Church, resources and books from Kate Holbrook, Jenny Reeder, Lisa Tait and other Church historians, and the Joseph Smith Papers.

I'm excited about the new ministering emphasis in the Church, which evokes the 1830 lay ministry in D&C Section 25, where the promises given to Emma are ours. Every member is a lay minister, and we're beginning to grasp the power of that and learning how to minister. I'm excited to see women's ministerial authority coming back and I hope we recover the "fullness" of 1842–44. I can't imagine a more exciting time in the Church and Mormon studies, as we're recovering our women's history and our empowerment.

I'm excited for you young women and men because of where you're at right now—the knowledge and sophistication you have is far beyond anything I had at BYU in the early 1980s. The courage and verve of your generation, where you're starting from is so powerful, you can do anything.

Today, you have freedom we did not have, freedom to find yourselves, to be what you want to be, to express yourselves. You have tremendous opportunity. I hope you seize it and dare to be yourself fully, share with the world what only you can bring to it.

Thanks for letting me share some of myself with you tonight.

## Ritual

*Emily Brown*

If a man has a dream and the dream is from God and the man writes a play based on the dream, the God, and other things he believes to be Godly

If a man has an experience one might classify as transcendent and the man tries to put that wordless vision into words and practices

If God shows a man everything and says tell everyone

If a girl feels angels breathing on her forehead but opens her eyes while praying

If a boy in the woods loves what is divine and cannot find a way to divinity by established means

If the poetry surrounding the event begins to be read as a series of proofs

If one tries to balance skin on a dividing thing, a divider—like a knife—

## Limen

*Emily Brown*

What I want is between softness and stone,  
between god and Adam— what I want,  
is something between fruits and meats.  
I want to move on the water and out of the water,  
I want to hang from the tree and rot in the earth.

I long for such separate and opposing things.  
I turn my head left and right;  
I wish I could face both directions,  
my body rended, running east and west.  
I turn to god, I turn to men,  
and I turn ahead to see trees.

This tree says, I've got all the answers.  
I think—  
    where is the border  
        between the skin of women  
            and the skin of that fruit?

## Then and Now

*Cheryl L. Bruno*

Had I one word to describe our Temple,  
The word used would undoubtedly be “white.”  
The corridors inside all glow with light,  
And purity within this space is ample.

I don't disparage Temples; I adore them.  
They're lovely, and the feeling is serene  
Folk enter, and folk exit, pure and clean,  
Their righteousness a recommend before them.

But once, Jehovah's temples glowed with color.  
Bright scarlet pomegranates bursting high  
The acrid incense wafting to the sky  
And bleating goats, the people's sins to cover.

A messy Temple, this: not white, but gory  
The blood and smells and disarray its glory.



## My New Temples

*Mette Ivie Harrison*

The beach is my temple,  
The water the voice of God shooshing toward me, inviting, calm,  
The stones the decorations that light the fire of the pillar,  
The sand the handshake that draws me to the holy of holies.

The forest is my temple, cool and dark and safe and quiet.  
I know what parts will lead me up hills, but I don't always know  
Where the new rocks will have lodged, or what parts of the trail  
Will have been cut out by water—but I know I will stumble and pick  
myself up after I fall.

The couch is my temple, where I sit and breathe deeply  
And feel God's presence rest upon me as I type His words,  
And My words together, joined as with a handshake  
That pulls me forward to my next step in life.

My son's bed is my temple, where I sit and hold his hand  
And tell him that he is good and kind and that  
Anyone who tells him otherwise is wrong  
And also that there is nothing wrong with the tears that fall down his face.

The nursery is my temple, with all the toys and sounds of laughter,  
Crying, and tugs of war. The little cups of water and napkins  
And goldfish and graham crackers that we would serve Christ if  
He were there, waiting for His sacrament.

## Skin of Garments

*Melodie Jackson*

Before I clothe myself in the holy garments of my grandmother's priesthood, my hands thin cocoa butter over the veins of my temple.

I have to protect my skin.

Knowing how bans restrict circulation—that suffocate me from my Mother's womb—a Mother that has been stripped of her Kente garments and clothed in the colonial cloaks of sanguine covenants,

I place a dab of the cream into my palm.

I join both hands, a celestial union worthy of eternal increase, and allow myself to feel water in the desert.

I reach for my back first.

Once, before knowing how unfamiliar fabric interacts with foreign beings, I directly clothed my body with those coats of skin.

It burned.

My skin tightened.

seized.

I thought I heard it weep. Asking why I would supplant its skin for another. Wondering whether Adam and Eve left the garden with scratched thighs and scarred legs from skin that wasn't formed by God.

Maybe it thought that was I skinning my skin for skin alternative.

Except

my body was alter native enough.

I rub into the crevices and bones of my back, making sure to submerge the paths of my amsistas' steps. I imagine that cotton against a back without water indeed burns until baptisms of Sahara flood all the dry places.

I move to my shoulders, then arms.

They feel heavy. Weighed down from reaching. Reaching for just the hem of garments. To make my temple and Eloher's temple one eternal round. But they say my issue of blood is too bright for their marble.

I cannot clothe the crimson cloaks until they spill the blood.

Maybe it is the *cloth* that is rejecting

my skin.

My torso welcomes the ointment. Covering my nakedness in ways that Ham forgot. Soothing the mark left by Shem and Japheth's negligent garment. That was sanded across my limbs until it turned me black.

The balm glides over my legs until I hit my feet. I think this is my Gilead. Refusing to forget the garment, that has just been whole underneath His feet, rent; torn; bloodied.

Because old garments and new bodies, bodies made whole by new garments and old bodies, do not endure in the presence of crucifixions and crumbling temples.

When the ritual is finished, you place the holy garment of my daughter's priesthood over my feet.

My legs.

My torso.

My arms.

My shoulders.

My back.

And together the temples whisper.

Thank You for Protecting My Skin.

## Friday Morning Shift

*Linda Hoffman Kimball*

I walk into the baptistry  
In our modest, midwestern temple  
Eager to fold fluffy towels  
Into their honorable offerings.

Someone is already there  
Creating the holy folds.  
The temple president  
In white (including his name tag)—  
Stands at the counter  
Smelling as clean as the dawn of creation.

Of all the many services  
Particular to his calling,  
This act nearly brings  
Me to my knees in gratitude.  
This—THIS!—  
Is the restoration of all things.  
This is the foot washing  
Of the 21st century.

For this leavening witness  
I would wave again my handkerchief  
Shouting “Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!”

## Prayers for the Altars

*Linda Hoffman Kimball*

Redeem these altars  
Whereon divine parity  
Was sacrificed.

Sanctify each one.  
Forgive them their trespasses.  
Remove any taint

Of residual  
Ungodly diminishment  
From their crocheted cloths.

Grant them new spirits.  
Help them heal the broken hearts  
Of those who once wept.

## Our Lady of the Temple

*Dayna Patterson*

Her favorite is the whisper of slippers on plush carpet.

Her favorite is the window of stained glass, jewel-bright, reminding her of a wildflower field and that cathedral in France.

Her favorite is the baptismal font's blue glow on the backs of 12 oxen.

It's the changing cubicle, the donning of white.

It's the laundry room, the hum of cycles.

It's cafeteria pudding, after a long session. Dinner and a movie.

Her favorite is Eve's beautiful face, her multiplied words.

Her favorite is her daughters' unveiled faces.

Her favorite is the prayer circle, her children gathered round her alter.

She loves gently pouring a secret name into the waiting funnel of the ear.

She loves sending her borrowed clothes down the chute.

She adores the light playing chase among the chandelier crystals.

Her favorite is the chlorine smell of her braid, her wrinkled fingers.

Her favorite is the soaked, scrubbed, scoured spirit she wears home after.

Her favorite is her home, after, all lit up like a holy place, a palace—one angel serenading her with his golden horn.

January 21, 2019

*Elizabeth Pinborough*

Hello, God, small and obscure, distant twinkly point of light.  
Perhaps, you are the portal and I am the time. I long  
thought the other way 'round.

I whistle through this little dark  
corridor of space, an earthly continuum—

waiting.

Waiting for the advance.  
Waiting for the Final Anointing.  
Waiting to be called up.  
Waiting to be chosen.

The giant night pearl blisters black, shrouded by earth-shadow.

I, your little girl with a willing heart, am ashes,  
burned to the ground of being, which is to say—  
whatever spiritual geometry you find, whatever  
compass and square with which you shape my mind,  
whatever plumb line you drop into eternity's pool,  
whatever thread with which you spool and unspool my nerves—  
come back, O God! Come back to me.

Do not hide yourself in lunar umbra. Reveal the light of your shining.  
From behind the sun's weak glare, release your radiance. Consume  
my heart with your lively burning. Infuse my cells with every wavelength  
of love you possess.



## Circles and Lines

*Dalene Rowley*

A ring of women  
Spontaneously gathered round  
Willing hands outstretched  
Gently pulling, untwisting, unbraiding  
Strands of gold, blue, brunette  
Tales of motherhood, neighborhood, sisterhood  
Spilling forth as a spring of fresh mountain waters  
Among friends and strangers soon-to-be-friends  
Gathered round to serve a sister  
Who needed 200 tiny braids unwound  
One Sabbath Eve

A ring of men  
Circled round tradition  
Willing hands outstretched  
Bouncing babies  
Pronouncing blessings  
Bestowing the gift of the Holy Ghost  
Extending lines of Priesthood power  
Down through the ages

Though one, perhaps more formal,  
Has a name  
I doubt not for one moment  
The power of the other  
Also borne of eternity  
Nor do I doubt its source  
For I am healed  
empowered  
lifted  
merely by being witness

## What Ashmae Taught Me

*Rachel Hunt Steenblik*

One time, in the temple,  
after looking, and smelling,  
and asking, and listening,  
a quietness spoke back  
that got louder and louder,  
pressing words into  
palms and the fleshy  
tablet of the heart.  
It said, She said:  
Spread my name  
like wildfire—  
like wildflowers,  
like wild forests.  
So we did.

## Prodigal Daughter

*Rachel Hunt Steenblik*

The lost daughter woke up  
and returned to herself,  
and determined she no  
longer wanted to be lost,  
and determined to  
return to her Mother.

When she was still very  
far, her Mother saw her  
and had compassion  
and dropped everything  
She was carrying—Her  
golden weaving and grief—  
and ran to her, Her precious  
daughter now found,  
and threw herself into  
her arms and kissed her.

## Devotion

*Terresa Wellborn*

*The heart can think of no devotion  
Greater than being shore to ocean  
Holding the curve of one position,  
Counting an endless repetition.*

—Robert Frost

Every Tuesday morning, sky dark,  
I rise to the temple. Today, by the  
time we reach the Garden, the  
actors need help with their lines.  
I am reminded of a school play,  
our drama teacher whispering  
our lines off stage, and us stuttering,  
poor acoustics, munged beneath  
spotlights. In the fallen world,  
the room warms. I fiddle with my  
sash as Eve's last words rise like a  
fresh tide across bright earth,  
while under cover of veil and fig  
leaf every Adam and Eve cry.



Emily Fox King  
Detail from "Mother's Day"  
oil on canvas

## BACKWARDS PIONEERS

Heidi Naylor

*The wall surrounding them they never saw;  
The angels, often. Angels were as common  
As birds or butterflies, but looked more human.  
As long as the wings were furled, they felt no awe.  
Beasts, too, were friendly. They could find no flaw  
In all of Eden: this was the first omen.  
The second was the dream which woke the woman.  
She dreamed she saw the lion sharpen his claw.  
As for the fruit, it had no taste at all.  
They had been warned of what was bound to happen.  
They had been told of something called the world.  
They had been told and told about the wall.  
They saw it now; the gate was standing open  
As they advanced, the giant wings unfurled.*

—“The Wall” by Donald Justice<sup>1</sup>

My earliest memory takes place in 1960s Wilkinsburg, where we lived while Dad finished his schooling at Carnegie Tech. Dark brick house and heavy gray sky. Warm, prickly air; a carpet of clover in the grass. A thick cement porch I loved, anchored with square pillars of the same black brick. Chipped concrete steps with graveled wounds and patches.

I’m being chased by the boy next door, a boy I barely know. He’s taller and wears a white button-down shirt and too-short dark slacks. White socks, dress shoes that slide in the grass. His hair is floppy, long and straight, perhaps wet, or slick with hair oil. He’s moving

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1. Donald Hall, “The Wall,” *Collected Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 13.

fast, slipping and pitching through the side yard between our houses, thrusting a hypodermic needle my way. “I jab you hiney! I jab you!” he yells. The needle glints in my peripheral vision. I’m too afraid to scream, just running, running.

In dreams he catches me. Decades later I realize he was saying my name. *Heidi*. Not hiney. Not honey. His name I’ve forgotten, or I never knew. Wilksburg was too rough for my Idaho farm-grown parents and their young family, and we didn’t stay long. My parents found an upstairs duplex apartment in another Pittsburgh suburb called Beechview, near the top of Rockland Avenue, a street impossibly steep and cobblestoned.

“How about a cold beer?” Joe Maloney asked my dad and the ward Elders quorum helpers, after a long day moving us in.

Our heavy mahogany piano had to be hoisted by pulleys and straps over the outside balcony. Nobody could imagine getting it out. When we moved again, a couple of years later, Dad dismantled it and turned it into a workbench.

Joe and his wife Kay owned the duplex. They lived downstairs with their two kids, same ages as Karl and me.

“Thanks, but no,” said my dad.

“Cuppa coffee?”

“Uh, no thanks.” That started the conversation that resulted in two things: a lifelong, cherished friendship between our families. Also, Joe and Kay studying and talking with the local missionaries for a time, and then deciding to get baptized. Before long, it was natural and wonderful to see the Maloneys at church as well as at home on Rockland Avenue.

Being a Latter-day Saint was—is—unusual in Pennsylvania, despite local pride in the church’s original baptisms within the state. The first LDS temple in Pennsylvania would not appear until 2016, and fewer than fifty thousand Latter-day Saints live in the state as of this writing. My parents must have felt somewhat at sea, as well as very welcomed

in the local branch. When they married in the Idaho Falls temple in 1962, my mother worked as a labor and delivery nurse in Logan, Utah. Dad, fresh off a 2 ½-year proselyting mission to West Germany, had entered Utah State University upon his return a few weeks before the wedding, without even a stop at the family farm on Idaho's Snake River. He'd never held a job outside that farm; nor had he, with a single year at Ricks College where they'd met, distinguished himself in any way at school. My mother proved patient with his life as a student, working to help him through his graduate fellowship at Carnegie.

They were ambitious and adventurous. Energetic. Backwards pioneers, having taken their faith, their capacity, their growing family east rather than west. After Dad graduated and began a successful engineering career, we moved from Rockland Avenue to Bethel Park, a leafy suburb with winding narrow roads, many of them graveled in the 1960s and 70s. One afternoon, an owl flew down the chimney of our stone cottage and into the dining room. Four more kids joined me and my brother Karl while we lived in Bethel Park.

Most of our school friends were Catholic, and lots of neighborhood kids went to parochial school: St. Louise or St. Thomas More. I played softball at St. Louise on McMurray Road, a couple of miles from home, and owned St. Louise de Marillac t-shirts in every M&M color as ball seasons advanced.

But every Sunday, my family traveled in the opposite direction, not once but twice to the LDS church three towns over, in Pleasant Hills. Dad had gone very early for leadership meetings. So Mom drove our green Ford Torino station wagon out and back, to Sunday school in the morning and sacrament meeting late in the afternoon—four trips total. Always through South Park, past the shelter that held a life-sized, lighted nativity in December; across Corrigan Drive, with its joggers and dogwalkers, its roller rink and swimming pool; then winding uphill through picnic groves and playgrounds and Frisbee fields. Shadows of leaves dappled the car windows, casting me alternately in sun and



shade as I watched people laughing, flipping burgers on the park grill, cracking open beers and Cokes, kids chasing around in shorts and sneakers. Many Pennsylvania days were rainy, but Sunday never was.

Occasionally we stopped to pick somebody up on the way: Marcy, recently baptized and stunning in her wide patent leather belt, her gingham skirt, and lacy blouse. Driving through South Park is mixed up with the faint cloud of her floral scent; eventually I identified it by accident at a Gimbels counter: *J'ardin des Temps*. We sometimes retrieved a man looking into church membership, who dug frantically into the crease of the wagon's back seat until he came up with a wrinkled, crumb-speckled seat belt.

We kids were gently but consistently socialized to fear nothing more than unchecked or rogue government; likewise to question and disparage the exorbitant reach of any church or authoritative body. I believe this stemmed from pioneer stories of exclusion, exile, even extermination; also, it was the 1960s. My parents played the records "If I Had a Hammer" and "Gentle on My Mind." My grade school principal, Mr. Frattaroli, was probably a competent and friendly man of normal dimensions; but I remember him as Mr. Fat and Roly Poly. A Petty Bureaucrat patrolled the Blackwater Falls campground. These were Dad's pet nicknames, always bestowed with a wink and a grin, but chosen to discourage in us any exaggerated sense of control by another.

Our parents were very friendly wherever we lived—Mom, especially, since she was a homemaker and knew the neighbors best; and it would be wrong to imply that her closest companions were LDS women, or that they were encouraged to be. Wilkinsburg's Mrs. Detar taught her the vagaries of expert pie crusts, and sent me a lovely wedding card, with a check, years after we moved away. Mom sewed and bottled fruit and shopped with Mrs. Clegg, our next-door neighbor in Bethel Park.

But it was also true that we belonged most quickly, most naturally with beloved friends in the LDS ward, and our family cultivated a strong

sense of otherness when we were away from those friends. Though I don't believe this was deliberate, it was consistent, self-protective.



Otherness is something many Mormons feel deeply and respond to in varying ways. As I look back on my parents' actions as sometime pioneers of the faith in Pennsylvania, I'm touched by several things. One is the core of fellow church members whose families kept the church going in that far-flung, forgotten place, stalwart and steadfast in the faith for generations. They are proud of the slender yet tough heritage that is theirs. Sidney Rigdon's First Baptist Church congregation had been based in Library, Pennsylvania, a city whose boundaries border Bethel Park. Wilsons and Barlows, Hares and Critchlows and Ireys and MacDonalds—they built (literally) the few LDS churches in Pittsburgh; they fundraised for the budget, did road shows and trips to Palmyra, worked at the welfare farm in Somerset; they longed for a temple one day. They are still hoping. The preemptive selection of Philadelphia's temple in 2008 was a bitter blow, in my father's eyes. Mormons clung to one another; they needed each other, they loved and served and friendshipped and married each other, perhaps more than in the Salt Lake Valley. How difficult some of the pronouncements from the Wasatch Front could be for Latter-day Saints in "the mission field"—no open houses or parties at baptisms, for example. This makes sense when a stake baptism may include several large families in Murray, Utah. But when just a few baptisms occur each year, a Pennsylvanian Saint wants the chance to bring a little potluck kielbasa and have a party in the gym with people they don't see at school or work or in the neighborhood, but with whom they share a deeply committed journey and worldview.

I'm struck also by how tightly my parents held to their faith, by how patiently they taught their family, and by how steadily they trusted that

they would be blessed and strengthened as they navigated a pathway where they were consistently the outsiders. Their first encounter with otherness, in Wilkinsburg, was frightening. Though they made connections—Mrs. Detar and my first remembered friend, Hercules—they felt, and rightly so, that the family was in danger. So they fled.

The second encounter, in Beechview, was different. My father quickly showed his colors and invited Joe Maloney to join him in his faith; and Joe and his family accepted. The original couples remain close friends, despite my parents' many moves over the years. When we lived upstairs, Karl and I played every day with their kids, Ronny and Susie. Here's how familiar Ronny Maloney's name remained to us: Years later in Bethel Park, my little sister became fed up with the invisibility attached to fourth place in a busy family. She dumped Lincoln Logs out of their zippered suitcase, filled it with extra underwear, doll, and teddy bear, and left the house. The penciled note she left on my parents' bed announced that she was "Ronny away."

Soon she was back, of course, safely home in the family and community that was hers. It's no accident that much of the hope Latter-day Saints cling to is centered in gathering—whether as members of a community that bears one another's burdens and strengthens the feeble knees, but also as forever families, as fellow travelers on a cosmic and eternal journey. We seek community, because we know deeply and instinctively what it is to feel its lack. We are famous for our proselytizing, at gathering others in to the communities we foster. Occasionally and ironically, we fall guilty of excluding or offending those not of our faith.

But otherness remains. For unlike first-generation pioneers, we've run out of frontier. We can't simply escape situations that make us uneasy or upset. Also unlike my my parents with their friends Joe and Kay, we won't often be able to persuade others to join us, in not only embracing the faith that engenders so much hope, but in joining a

singular community. Most of the time, we have to find ways to navigate our faith and the otherness it engenders. For some, otherness becomes enough of a burden that they reject faith: they “Ronny away.” For all of us, recognizing the burden of peculiarity is painful. It’s a kind of fall, one we’re warned about; one we can’t escape.



Dad taught Karl and me to swim on Monday nights at the long, kidney-shaped South Park pool, near our Bethel Park home. He’d walk slowly backwards, keeping just out of reach as we struck and wheeled toward him. Karl had a wild, splashy stroke; mine was less frantic, but tentative and crooked. I was afraid to open my eyes underwater, and when I finally did, my father’s legs looked so white and sculptural I worried they weren’t real.

He must have recognized we weren’t really getting it, because Karl and I were eventually enrolled in summer lessons at Bethel Park High School’s indoor pool.

By the end of our two-week session there, I knew my strengths and weaknesses as a swimmer. My stroke had evened out, and I churned the top of the water smoothly. Coach announced that we’d be tested to move from Guppies to Flying Fish. The test was clear—swim to the other side without touching the bottom of the pool. “If you touch bottom, you’re done,” he said.

No problem. While I waited in line with Karl, chlorinated drops fell from the end of my nose, from my long hair. My fingertips were pale, crinkled raisins, plucking at my swimsuit and letting it smack wet against my skin. I loved this pool, loved that Karl and I were taking real lessons finally, with lots of other, similar kids; not those babyish ones on Monday nights at South Park Pool with only our father. The cavernous room echoed with splashes and shouts. I tasted the chemical air and blinked droplets out of my eyes.

I understood what I was to do, and I knew that I could do it. I saw clearly, too, why we were forbidden, by coach and parent, to dive headfirst in this shallower end of the water. I understood. So when my turn came, I gulped a mighty breath and jumped in, ready to lengthen my body and stroke hard for the finish.

Immediately I was assaulted by the rough concrete floor of the pool. I couldn't mistake what had happened: my foot had definitely scraped the bottom. Had anyone seen this? What should I do? Although my predicament was likely *not* seen, I wasn't worried about coach's authority; I was concerned with another authority. If I wanted to be honest, I'd have to admit I had failed the test before it began. I knew it, and I knew that God knew it. The test, for me, was no longer about swimming. I turned to the side and climbed out.

About a minute later, Karl did the exact same thing.

Confused, wet, unwarmed and uncomforted by what must have seemed to us a mild and private triumph of integrity, we two guppies huddled together in solidarity. We were clearly the nuttiest kids at the pool, and we made no effort to explain what had happened or to ask for another chance. We clutched our elbows, shivering and dripping, our wrinkled feet leaving wet prints on faded turquoise tiles as we made our way behind stacks of shellacked bleachers, past steam-soaked walls toward the colder cold of the locker rooms. We talked to nobody, and nobody talked to us.

I couldn't risk looking at the coach or the other kids, not at all. I saw only one thing: that our gifts—mine and my brother's—they felt like the wrong gifts. Our heritage, strong and sure and hard-fought: that lifeline, its foundation of faith and community and certainly of love—something about it had betrayed us, and not for the last time. It made us at the same time optimistic, sensible and proud, capable through resilience, reliance, patience, even congregation; but also stupid, inflexible, incapable of fulfilling the easiest, most accessible

expectations; wary and isolated and out of touch. In need of rescue. Of escape.

My brother and I were beginning to understand that somehow we'd been born breech; we'd fallen from the secure walls and safety of our family, our faith—we'd fallen into Pennsylvania backward. We were relentlessly, systemically other. And our choices in regarding, embracing, living the faith and the scattered legacy of LDS pioneers would be as complicated as theirs—in gathering against otherness—had been. We've needed and continue to need a long time, a lifetime, to begin to work them out.



Emily Fox King  
"Bitumen"  
oil on canvas, 48" x 48"

# FOUR WORDS: A SMALL CHANGE WITH AN ETERNITY OF IMPACT

Sara Lake

Today, I went to the new initiatory session. When I arrived, the cute workers excitedly whispered to each other, “we have a patron!”

I was the first of the day.

It felt so good to be there.

Regardless of my thoughts on the necessity or literalism of the temple ceremonies, I still feel such a distinct holiness and peace there. Something I believe is powered by the faith of the people, willing it so.

The first time through, the worker accidentally recited the line: that you may hear the . . .

counsel of your husband

. . . then fumbled to correct herself before proceeding with blessing that I may hear the . . .

voice of the Lord.

Four words.

I started crying.

As soon as the blessing ended, I asked if that line had actually been removed. She quickly and a little uncomfortably said “yes.” Then, looking down, quietly shrugged, “I’m not sure exactly why it matters?”

I leaned into her space a little, and knowing I was the only patron rotating through, paused to tell her that to many women the absence of those four words would be profoundly reassuring. I shared that I know women who have felt hurt or demeaned by those words— who have carried unresolved concern over their implications on their circumstances. I expressed that deleting them gives greater and proper emphasis to our



ability to hear and listen the Lord's voice, for ourselves. My emotion was showing and I reached to touch her arm as I expressed my personal appreciation for the change.

She smiled, and with tender eyes reached her hand onto mine in a conveyed respect as she proceeded. I could tell my heart reached hers and she understood something more through my perspective.



I let the ceremony, each word, speak to me in ways that I have missed. I rotated through a few times more and talked with the other workers about that small change. They were all so beautiful and receptive.

I rotated back to the first worker again in the same room. She paused at that very same place, distinctly leaving the husband reference out this time, and then began to sweetly cry when she blessed:

. . . that I may hear the voice of the Lord.

It meant something new to her, I could tell—and I was moved by the humility I witnessed.

It's not that I give undue power to the language—the change is meaningful because it shows that people were willing to evaluate the significance of the words and hear a different perspective—then make a change for the better.

*That* is what is reassuring.

Seeing tradition, pride, and even stubborn patriarchy challenged and slowly being chipped away . . . in small ways, but significant ways nonetheless.

I know for some this is a little too late, or too little change. I hear you. My heart pangs for you with both gratitude and remorse for your painful pioneering. But for me, today, it's meaningful progress.



Four words changed.

And it led to a moment of spiritual growth and connectedness; two women connecting our hearts with each other, and with God—

In gratitude for progress and acknowledgement of the divine capability—and responsibility—each of us has to

Hear the voice of the Lord!



Emily Fox King  
Detail from "Mother's Day"  
oil on canvas

## The Color of Longing

*Melody Newey Johnson*

*After a painting by Emily Fox King*

This blood, this longing was meant for  
your particular darkness. That shadow,  
the red droplet on the floor, a new wound:  
These are mine to name. And in my name  
you are known, no less worthy than your  
brother. No less chosen for this canvas of  
violence and change.

If there were a name, I'd give it to legion.

You lit a candle at dawn, robbed the  
blue hour of her longing; doubted green  
when everything told you I was there:

between shadow and stem.

If there were a way to ring you around rosies  
and ashes and posies, I would mark you,  
smudge you with flower and rain;  
your longing, your song, sung long past dusk.

This edge is the answer to your longing.

If you thought you could summon me with  
longing, you did. And I waited in the blue hour,  
before the candle, before dust-shine when  
the sun broke. If you thought I could save you  
with shades of color, you were right.

If you know the leaf edge, the yellow dust  
in the heart of the blossom, the red droplet,  
you are closer to home than you think.

I found you there once: In yellow.

The blood, the mud, the unnamed woman:  
known to me. The longing between root  
and blossom: your nursery. At this edge,  
light shelters every darkness, every moment  
you wish for something other, knowable, and sane.  
This color, this bloom, bears your name.

Come, now, let's see what you make.

EXCERPTS FROM *BEFORE US LIKE A  
LAND OF DREAMS*

Karin Anderson

From "Homing"

*In which our protagonist, a crabby aging mother and professor, drives from Salt Lake City to her father's birthplace—Safford, Arizona—to visit an infant's gravesite. Year: 2016.*

Grandma Anderson said one of the best things about living in Safford was seeing a gaggle of Mexican kids making their way down the street, pulling a red wagon stacked full of homemade tamales, a nickel apiece. She'd step out and wave them over. So, once I calmed down, once I pulled off the diagonal strip of twenty-first-century traffic signals, franchises, and cheap motel chains, I thought to find a little takeout Mexican place. A few streets down I drove into a time warp. A gracious yellow-brick post office rose up, a clear landmark as I passed it on my right going south. And there was Main Street, nearly abandoned but preserved.

At the west end, a dignified city hall. But for the contemporary cars, my grandparents could have strolled onto the spot where I stood, engrossed in conversation, and walked the length before they realized something wasn't right. Suddenly they would notice how still the street had become, how many storefronts were empty or painted opaque or stacked with inconceivable objects. No billing on the movie marquee. They might wonder at the low roar of heavy traffic a few blocks north.

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1. *Before Us Like a Land of Dreams* by Karin Anderson. Release date: May 14, 2019, Torrey House Press. For more information, see <https://www.torreyhouse.org/before-us-like-a-land-of-dreams>.

But then they'd see the café was open just like it always was, with its shotgun floor plan and counter seats suspended over blue and white tiles. They might be surprised that it now served only Mexican food but they'd order tamales, just like I did, and probably have them wrapped to go, as I requested, and retreat to a safe spot in the outskirt hills to consider the strangeness.

As I did. I had already reserved a little camping cabin at the state park a few miles south of town. I was grateful for my own forethought and in defiance of my grandparents I bought a bottle of wine at the Circle K on my way out of town. I parked at Cabin 5, Roadrunner, opening the car door to a thicket of bird calls. Ducks, grebes, mourning doves, blackbirds. Other voices I could not name. It was too dark now to see the creatures but the shoreline of tiny Roper Lake was right there, screened by a tangle of willows and reeds. I unloaded my baggage. The cabin was cute. A playhouse. The front section had a double bed. Behind a half-partition, two pine bunkbeds.

I couldn't help it: four little children. Irrational maternal reach. I don't expect that every woman is made to be a mother, but I was. One true thing. Small bodies tumbled past me, arguing as they chose their beds, settling in to arrange and elaborate and fall together into their private and compelling world. I hadn't heard from a single one of the grown versions in all this driving away, and I was glad because it meant they were each engrossed in their orbits. And so their small sudden return took me down.

I slept, or passed out, but at some point I walked back out to the car to fetch the yet-warm tamales, hoping they would help conjure ancestors rather than descendants. I carried the sack to the picnic table on the porch under the rising moon, relieved to be invisible to the quiet visitors from all their places. But I could not make myself eat. I left the wine unopened. I gathered everything and carried it across the dark lot to the trash bin. I walked to the lapping shore and stood in the dark. I stepped in a few feet, past my knees. Night birds called true to one another.

The next morning I took a walk around the lake, grateful for the new-knit tibia and fibula although they hurt. Another story but it did make me recall Ignatius. I loaded the car. I intended to spend the morning walking through town taking notes, all writerly. I thought I'd cleared my head from yesterday's drive. I went north back to Safford, further than I recalled—about ten miles--and I reacted by swinging left toward town at the first intersection. I'd turned too soon, but the town wasn't huge and this looked like a perimeter, so I went forward.

A half-mile more and I was passing gravestones to my right, and then I saw the arched entry sign. Safford Union Cemetery. I yanked the wheel, squealing the tires. Crosses and Madonnas and glitter-foil buntings to my right and left told me I was not in the Mormon section. I pulled up to a tall community cross and veteran's memorial, queerly lavender. I parked and rolled the windows down. Birdsong struck like a chorale.

I stepped out and spun around to assess. The cemetery extended for several acres but it was easy to see I was in the old section. Tall cypress trees, filled-up plots. No grass in this desert bedding. Bouquets—some bright fabric or plastic, some real and wilted—and tinsel wreaths pulsed against the dull mineral background. Most of the plots had been walled into family rectangles. A weedy succulent provided random fist-sized blobs of green in the places nobody walked. Graves with Spanish names were colorful and highly attended. Saints and Madonnas, statues of Jesus. Buntings and streamers.

I surveyed the acreage to spot the uniform nonconformity, a section of headstones, flat and distinctively crossless, to locate my dead affiliates. I walked over to browse. Mormon epitaphs, line-carved images of hornblowing Moroni and spired temples. Still, there were many markers. Each family enclosure looked to be holding ten or twelve graves.

Diagonal from where I stood, just a few frames up, a barren plot. A small black headstone all alone. No flowers or bunting. No wall. Placed



to keep cars at bay, a three-foot spigot pipe rose just behind. I walked over. There it was.

LORRAINE  
Daughter of  
Clyde LeRoy and Constance Porter  
ANDERSON  
Oct. 27, 1940  
Oct. 28, 1940

I couldn't think what to do about it.

My single emotion was anger at myself for making footprints on top of the baby. In a climate like this the disturbance could last a decade. I backed up, sat on the low wall of the next plot over, and worked myself up about the footprints. I tried to distract myself by analyzing the site. One six-pound infant in a box that was, intact, maybe twenty-five inches long, fifteen wide. The rest of the plot was pristine. But for my footprints it was clear no boots had trampled this spot for decades.

I believed I had committed an ugly trespass. I did not care to be a family representative. Most of my relatives would concur I'm the wrong person.

I took a few phone shots and sent them to my sisters. My pulse leaped in gratitude as they each answered.

I gazed up at big Mount Graham.

I've been clear with my children: cremate. Let fly the ashes. Do not enclose any remnant of me. No urn, no vials, no plaster or cement or dirt. Scatter. I don't believe in souls, and even if I did I don't see why they would hang around their own suffocated remains. I recalled the coroner's words to my grandmother: probably nothing to move. Dust. At this moment I hoped it was so, but then again I knew there had to be some forensic trace. Safford receives nine inches of rainfall per year. Perfect dry air, unsaturated ground. The southwest desert yields many artifacts, including well-preserved human remains, centuries old.

The first house I bought after my marriage collapsed like a sinkhole was a nondescript brick rambler with a glorious old-time yard. But the interior could have been a Museum of 1974, which can get to you if you didn't love 1974. The first month, the pipes under the kitchen sink ruptured. When the plumber came to tear it all out, the debris beneath the cabinets was archaeological. Mostly it was sawdust, with nails and cigarette butts stirred in. But laid out as if for admiration was a skeleton of a mouse, intact to the last vertebral tip of its tail, fitted like an intricate magical toy.

I should have been repulsed but I had to keep myself from caressing it, and now among all of that unsettled recollection I was picturing the exquisite bones of a human infant prone and pristine under my boot prints, the skin of her strange webbed fingers fallen away, the haunting caul that covered her face and neck dissolved, the deep structure of mystery revealed yet unresolved.

I sat longer and recalled a cold morning when I was fourteen and our parents were away on a weeklong trip. My brother and I walked in the morning chill, down that back line to Grandma's barn to feed the animals Dad was sheltering there until he returned. We knew the ewes were pregnant but they weren't yet due. Even before we cleared Grandma's stile we could see something was wrong. The horses stood away at the far end of the pasture. The sheep huddled against the barn, one a bloody mess.

We drew closer. A dead lamb lay in the open field, enclosed in its now-frozen sac. Another, a twin that may have taken a few steps before freezing, lay a few feet beyond.

A breath or two, a falter, all done.

This kind of thinking is why the many descendants of the parents marked on this baby's headstone would nominate anyone but me to trip to such a solemn site and eulogize. I tried to quit it. I worked to clear my mind and keep the space pure. I stood up to atone for the footprints. I knelt on my right knee and held the screwed-and-bolted left one out

at an awkward angle. I smoothed the footprints with my palm, revealing soft fine dirt beneath the gravel. I made a circle. I eased up on the strength of my good knee and walked the larger plot to gather stones the size of peach pits.

The desert looks colorless until you pick it up: juniper green, terra cotta, cherts in black and blue, mustard yellow. I carried them back to the circle, careful about new footprints, and lined them into a spiral—“Spiral Jetty,” my youngest would have called it, if she were here and still small; I recalled a good day with her, years ago, at the north shore of the Great Salt Lake. Now I stepped sideways to encircle the mini-jetty in footprint rays, hoping that at some point those nine annual inches of rain would neutralize them, and camouflage the stones. All of this business cleared my mind. I forgot myself and time dropped when I stood up. The air congealed above the little piece of ground that I knew for a fact my own people had stood upon, late October 1940.

I step in.

People mill about, printing this dirt with hundreds of tracks. The Mormon ward has come out, and the Catholic family that makes tamales as well. I am grateful for the crowd—not for my grandparents’ sake, as they’re in no social mood, but for my own. The bodies allow me to acclimate.

Women huddle in little knots, all wearing hats, many holding babies. I wear jeans and boots, and because a Safford October feels a lot like a Safford February, a sleeveless cowboy shirt. My hair is straight and a little dirty. I make an effort to pull it into a civilized ponytail.

Children run about, shouting and tagging. Some settle a moment when rebuked but then light out again. Some are smart enough to stay out of reach. Men stand gazing outward, holding this hard domestic moment at arm’s length.

Everyone here is emerging from a Depression. I compose a list of wonders and terrors these people have not yet seen. How much they do not know. I feel a superior tingle of prescience like air before lightning, but when it strikes up there on the high peaks, purpling the sunlight, I comprehend it's the flicker of my own unreadable future. Theirs has come and gone. I can see that, too, a black roiling mist fitting the harsh ridges.

I do not have a guide and now I realize why I should.

The people I hope to address are behind me but I am not prepared to turn.

I walk erratic to the north edge of October 1940. On the cinder road my boots sound like coins in a shaken box. The cemetery rests on a swell above the city. It's easy to trace every spot the channeled water touches below: neat family gardens, cypress rows, bright floral patches. Little houses beam up in stucco blue and green, butter yellow, tangerine.

I strain my vision northward over valley and range. I miss my children so sharply my chest feels scraped out. At this moment they feel more lost to me than the spectral noisemakers frolicking among the headstones.

They are not here. I am not anywhere.

Time cracks, bottomless and black and I drop down. Warm snow, powdered and deep. Salt water scouring my fine mouse bones.

I reach for the story. I turn to face the milling mourners. The extras are collecting their children and clearing out. I walk in a deliberate, counting pace, breathing to it, willing the last of them to drive off in their movie cars. The remainers are clearer now, figures I can sharpen the same way I focus a camera lens. Clyde and Connie stand together at the fresh-dug hole. It's larger than it needs to be to hold the tiny box, because first it had to contain a man with a shovel.

I halt to adjust the image, dialing back my grandmother's age. Her hair darkens. It's longer and pulled back in a careless roll. She came with a hat but it's on the ground. She moves more quickly than I remember.

Her shoulders are strong and well-defined but I recall she has recently delivered an infant, so her patterned dress smocks over a muddled waistline. Stockings black, sturdy shoes. I feel a surge of plain love at the distinctive way she nods her head, and how she stands, feet too far apart. She's the same height as her husband, maybe taller.

I am not ready to converse so I size up the man beside her. I know he is bald under his sharp felt hat, has been since his early twenties. He's built small and tight. I see his masculine deftness now, because my younger son is framed in likeness. My son permits me to invent a man I never knew. Deep-voiced, soft-spoken. Moves like lake water. He's made of dense bone and lean muscle, stands in relaxed attention even here at the burial of his baby daughter.

He's a compelling man, even with that fury -- maybe, at this point of my life, because of it. Still I cannot bring myself to speak. I see my father, Tommy, and his brother Chris over there among the trees, tired of this solemn not-Sunday afternoon. Tommy is five since July. Chris is three, towheaded. He looks like a storybook angel but I know he's no such thing. Where's Lynne? She's a toddler, barely a year older than this baby about to be buried. I place her in her father's arms to test him. She squirms backward and down, the way small walkers do when they want to explore. He sets her down, but gently. She steps and tumbles, cries, then discovers the dirt and colored stones.

I walk nearer, looking for a six-year-old. I know I can talk to her. This one will play life hard and she'll be tough enough to enjoy it. Right now she's a skinny line experimenting with elegance. She's missing front teeth. She gives me a precocious side-eye.

I say, "Hello, Mary."

She scowls, intrigued.

"You aren't supposed to be here," she says.

I spent a warm evening at Mary's place a few years ago. Good wine and strong conversation. Sometimes I think Mary is crazy. Sometimes I don't. Her daughters probably felt the same about my father. I haven't

seen Mary in a long time; she tends to approach and retreat. Maybe this time, right here, will be the last.

“How do you know I don’t belong?”

“You’re wearing the wrong clothes.”

I put my finger to my lips. “Don’t tell anyone. No one else will notice.”

She’s pleased to keep a secret. I point toward Tommy banging along the fence line. “Is that your brother?”

“Yes. Both. Stupid boys.” She’ll be surprised by how long she outlives her almost-twin. “Who are you?”

Another secret. “I’m a time traveler.”

“You are not.”

“Okay. I came down from Utah. I’m here to see your mother. She’s very sad today.”

“I know. The baby died.” Mary is sympathetic but preoccupied with her own fierce thoughts. I want to prophesy while I have the advantage but I’m not here to dispense revelation.

I make a plan. One question per character. “Mary. What do you love?”

She thinks this over. “Nothing. I hate everything.”

I veer from the plan. “Okay then. Who do you love?”

“I hate everyone.”

That makes me laugh. “No you don’t. You’ll see.”

“No, *you’ll* see,” she says and fades off as I walk toward her parents. Clyde sees me coming, nods as if he knows me but then double-takes.

I’m committed now. “I’m sorry for your loss, Brother Anderson.”

He tilts his head. “Do I know you?”

“Parts of me.”

“Where do you come from? You’re made like my mother and sister.”

“That’s no revelation. My father told me that.”

He is sifting evidence. This is the sort of day he might expect a visitation but I’m not the kind he’s been watching for.

“Let me shake your hand,” he says.

I know what he's up to. He intends to discern whether I am a good or a bad angel. I'm not certain I'm corporeal so I keep my hands to my sides. This means that I am a good messenger made of spirit; I will not offer a hand to deceive him. He waits me out. I slide my hands into my back pockets.

He appears to be satisfied, and he asks, "Do you know what happens to us?"

I know he will make his wife pregnant five more times. I know he'll soon move his family north to Salt Lake City. I know his definition of paternal discipline will escalate into what the law in my time would frankly call abuse. I know he'll buy a dairy farm in Alpine to try working his oldest son into compliance.

I know he'll die in a fiery explosion thirty thousand feet above the Mediterranean Sea, leaving one son at least to assemble himself in a house of broken mirrors.

He will have sixty grandchildren. He will not live to know a single one of us.

"Only a little," I say.

"What have you come to tell me?"

I haven't come to tell him anything. But here he is. Here he always is.

*I've come to tell you to fuck off, you disgusting fuck.*

*I've come to tell you a whole family has filled in your absence with wishes, with justifications and incriminations, emulations, with a better ending to your story.*

*I've come to diminish you so I can get on with more relevant outrages.*

*I've come to tell you I understand it's plain infuriating to be alive and the gorgeous parts are only exacerbations.*

I don't have it in me. These people are dead. He got what he had coming and probably more. Blown into black sky, lost in strange waters. Sent home rotting in a sealed box.

And so I fade.

“I came all this way, but the more I think about it, the less I have to tell you. The actual road is not like a line on the map. I just drove over that Coronado Trail. You’ve got to know what I mean.”

He has my father’s laugh. I like him. I fear him in all of us.

My grandfather and I glance together toward the little boys throwing rocks at a post. Excellent aim. I pick up a smooth red stone and throw it clean in Tommy’s direction.

Clyde says, “Oh. I see.”

“Yes, but this is all you’ll ever see of me. And I have a question for you.”

He doesn’t want to hear it but he attends.

“Are you better for them dead than you were alive?”

“How long do I have?”

“About a decade.”

He is truly stunned. He takes stock of his little children. He reaches a hand toward his wife. He tilts his head, and straightens it to look me in the eye. I hold my bluff. I’ve played him with his own formula and so he squares himself to answer.

“You know, my father never relented at all. I’ve loved my own children better far than I received. I might have left him behind. I might have become better.”

“Do you think you would have?”

“How can I know? I believe there’s something of my mother in me.”

He looks to the mountain. “A story of a man is not the man himself. My children will not wish me dead, no matter how much they wish me to be a better father.”

I don’t know. What children do not sometimes wish their parents dead?

Now he looks toward the sky, and then across the acres of the deceased.

I step a pattern of rays with my twenty-first-century boots. “How much is unforgivable? I saw you—the ghost of you—in my father’s worst moments. I don’t know how to forgive him. I don’t know that I should.”



He glints at me strangely, lifting his hand as if to touch mine. I don't know whether it's tenderness or an attempt to confirm his suspicion that somehow I am cheating the messenger formula. This man is not stupid. I jerk my hand away.

"How long are we responsible?" he asks. "When do we leave them to answer for their own good and evil?"

He flexes his jaw the way my father used to. He gestures downward, as if sweeping something behind him. "I've got to round up those boys. Please excuse me now."

My grandmother stands.

"We'd best go," she says. "They'll be coming in to close it up."

She knows the men with the shovels await.

I make them vanish another moment, and she relaxes. She meets my eyes.

"I'm sorry. I don't recall whether we've been introduced."

"Not yet and forever ago."

I conjure a bench and she consents to sit.

"I'm sorry about the baby."

"Well, I don't know what to say about that."

"Why aren't your parents here? Where's your family?"

"It's a long way. We had to take care of this. Some of them are driving down next week."

She thinks. She comes to a certain clarity and reaches to touch my knee. "How did *you* get here so soon?"

"Down the Devil's Highway. Don't ask to shake my hand."

She laughs at my joke, very gratifying, and she bobs her head as if to clear her mind. Neither of us can quite make out what time this is.

"How do things go with your husband?" she asks. "I only get to see the first part."

"Not so well. But the kids—wish you could know them. They'd worry you though. And I'll still do everything I'm gonna do."

She looks toward hers. Mary sashays in our direction. Clyde is bringing in the boys but allows them to meander. Baby Lynne is tasting rocks. The tiny coffin hovers over the abyss.

“Why aren’t you acquainted with my husband?”

“He’s only a story.”

“No. Absolutely he is not.”

“I watched you all those years, alone. I loved your house. You had people and solitude both. I must have come to believe that this is the way mothers go. A house empty and full at once. Books. A garden and trees, hours to be in them. But now I’m afraid.”

“You ought to be. Did you imagine this would be easier than the seasons before it?”

She lifts her hand at the wrist, pointing a sideways finger into arid blue. “You spend your life trying to keep everything gathered. But when you succeed it’s all about scatter. Children grow up and get on. As they must.”

She gestures toward the grave. “You can’t hold what must go.”

She bumps her shoulder against mine. “And you can’t let go what you must hold. This is a sin. The kind you still believe in.”

We face west, tracing out the green and gray mountain, falling to silhouette. I wish to sit a little longer.

“Mount Graham looks a lot like Lone Peak. In Alpine. I mean in its general mood and conformation.”

“We thought so, too.”

The husband and children were very near.

“Grandma. Should I go home?”

“The day death comes for you, your life will seem briefer than this one in the box. No need to hurry it.”

She stood in her time, urgent to greet the approaching man.

I lingered to catch a glimpse of Tommy, who gave me frank little-boy appraisal. A quick grin. He put his hand in his father’s and waved me off.

Clyde: “Can you be so casually lost to them?”

Constance: "Go home."

I stood, sifting, and she said, "You can recite these words as well as I can. I will read them to you some time: 'There is a concatenation of events in this best of all possible worlds.'"

I read them again years later in a college French class. Concatenation.

*Cela est bien dit, mais il faut cultiver notre jardin.*

Something sat hard in my gut.

Mourning doves provided a two-note flute song as I walked back to my car. I kept driving south. I lost my bearings entirely. I could see Mexico, right there to my left, and I bounced along the ludicrous boundary wishing I could punch through to Patagonia.

At some point in the muddle I must have reached a turning point. A reluctant return.



### From "Devil's Gate"

*Crabby mother/professor listens to characters speak from within a fragmented ancestral story. The younger brother of a family of older sisters has shocked his Mormon family by planning to marry a fortuneteller. Settings: Safford, Arizona and Ashton, Idaho, early 1940s; Orem, Utah, early 1970s; Smithfield, Utah, late 1800s.*

Connie Porter Anderson: First lines of Erma's letter were, "Well, that wasn't the end of it after all. Steve's gotten that Ruth Loveday pregnant. We're going to have a new sister-in-law, and by golly, she's a keeper. She grew up on the train tracks. No family to speak of, although Steve says her daddy's coming in from the far edge of the known world sometime to bless the happy couple. And here's the best part: the girl's a fortuneteller. We have a Gypsy in the family!"

I didn't know what to make of that. I knew she wasn't a real Gypsy but everything that word brought to mind was disturbing to me—more

so than I could account for. That night I told Clyde that Steve was getting married. I even told him the girl was pregnant and that she was one of those Pocatello types, but I didn't show him Erma's letter or mention the voodoo. I'm not sure why it was so hard to say it. Clyde would have made a joke and put it out of his mind. Even so I didn't want the words to come out of my mouth.

I feared if I said, "She reads palms for extra cash," or, "Steve says Ruth can read your life in a deck of cards," I'd make something come true that I was not prepared to contend with. I didn't believe in any of that Maid of Mystery tripe. And yet again, I knew there were supernatural presences, both good and evil, all around us. I knew that servants of Satan watch for any opportunity to enter our minds and convince us that their logic is our own. The devil's helpers are eager to answer when we call. Using the wrong authority to address spirits in the world beyond, even if they might seem benign, is asking for trouble. Steve of all people didn't need any of that. Furthermore, it was his responsibility as husband to control the spiritual communications within his household. The Melchizedek Priesthood is a man's sacred inheritance to be used as a blessing to his wife and children. To invert that sacred family order could bring down disaster.

I lay uneasy all night fearing that even Erma's letter had attracted the attentions of evil spirits. In the morning I carried it out to the bin and burned it.

Ruth Loveday Porter: In September I carefully folded and packed the dress my girlfriends and I had chosen for the grand occasion. It wasn't white of course. It wasn't even a wedding gown but it was pretty and demure. I looked respectable in it. Sky blue with a neat collar. Buttoned down the front but draping above the waist so I could wear it without calling attention to my widening girth.

I got some sleep after work but set my alarm clock for midnight. Steve waited outside. He took the valise from my hand and we walked on up to the depot, rode quiet, and left the sleeping tourists in the cars as we stepped onto the Ashton platform in dead dark. The train pulled away. Crickets chirped unnaturally loud. The grain and spud elevators stood like disapproving titans above us. There was not a human being in sight. Even the office was locked. A single-bulb lamp on a post emitted the only light but starlight.

We stood. The weather was turning and the slight wind made me shiver. Steve stood behind me to press his warmth against my back, bringing his hands around to shield the incomprehensible thing inside me.

“Don’t worry, Ruth. It’s all going to be grand. You and me and little Bambino. We’ll take on the world. You’ll see.”

The sound of a lone vehicle on the highway filled in for conversation.

“Hope that’s them,” I said. We left the suitcases and walked out a way to see around the silos. We watched the headlights approach for a mile. The vehicle slowed at the Main Street turn, signaling right and the beams came around.

“It’s not the Buick,” Steve said, and in a minute we could make it out as a pickup truck. Suddenly we were all illuminated, stars of our own show. The horn made a little toot and a woman’s hand waved from the shotgun side.

“It’s Gene and Erma,” Steve said, but he was wrong. The truck stopped and Erma spilled out from the driver’s seat. Another woman hopped down from the other door.

“Steve!” they both cried and Steve said, “Oh! It’s Erma and Gladys! What in the world are you two doing up this time of night?”

“What do you think?” said Gladys. “We’re coming for the prodigal brother, and—” she took a gander at me, “—and the prodigal’s fiancée! Hello, Ruth. I’m Gladys.”

“Pleased to meet you.”

Gladys was the prettiest of them all. Long curly hair. Wide shoulders and a slender waist. Her eyes were animated even in this darkness.

“I’ll bet you’re very tired,” Erma said. “Pile in. Let’s get you to a nice warm bed.”

“Who sits on Steve’s lap? Me, or Ruth?”

“You can ride in the back, big boy,” Erma said. “In you go, Ruth. You can sit between Gladys and me. We won’t bite.”

“Didn’t you bring any luggage?”

“On the platform.”

“Here we go.”

Steve leaped out to grab the valises as Erma pulled up to the depot. He tossed them in among the bales of straw, settled himself against the cab, and rapped on the window. Erma eased into gear and let out the clutch. I expected her to blaze out of the lot in the same fashion as her father, but she was decisive and deliberate.

“I’ve never rode in a car with a woman driver,” I said.

“Didn’t anyone ever teach you to drive?”

“We never had a car.”

Steve’s sisters considered this.

“It’s probably a necessity of farming,” Gladys offered. “Girls learn to drive tractors just like the boys around here. And somebody’s got to run errands into town, isn’t that right? Most of our mothers don’t drive but girls our age do. Mostly.”

“Connie’s never quite gotten the knack of it,” Erma said, and they both giggled.

Erma slowed to turn toward Ora and the Porter farm. The blinker sounded urgent in this early dark hour. “Ruth,” she said. “Do you mind—I mean, for our parents’ sake, we’ve arranged to have you stay at Gene’s folks’ place. They’re awfully nice people. It’s a lovely room, upstairs and quiet. You can sleep late if you like and get all refreshed and ready for the festivities.”

“That’s fine,” I said. “I don’t want to trouble anyone. Not your parents or nobody else.”

Neither one of them answered until we pulled up to the house. As the truck came to a stop Gladys said, “It’s all going to be all right, you know. We just have to get through tomorrow. Or today—whatever it is this time of night.”

I glanced toward the darkened house. The porch light shone harsh in the velvet air. Steve jumped out. He came around to Gladys’s door and opened it.

“Where’s everyone sleeping?”

“I’m sleeping here,” said Gladys. “And you are, too.”

“Glade come with you?”

“No, he’s haying.”

Steve looked dubious about that but he said, “Can Ruth sleep with you, then?”

“She’s coming with me,” Erma said. “Gene’s folks have a nice room all ready.”

Steve flexed his jaw. He looked about to argue or go in and confront his parents, but instead he said, “Well, that sure is nice of everyone to have it all arranged like that. Ruth, I’ll come find you in the morning.”

“No you won’t,” Erma said. “I’ll take care of her. Groom can’t see the bride until the wedding. It’s bad luck.”

“Oh, for hell’s sake, Erma. Ruth and I have seen pretty much every inch of each other before the wedding. Everybody knows this is a shotgun affair. Now all of a sudden you’re a bunch of busybodies.”

I know I blushed, but it was dark. Gladys and Erma made a little disapproving gasp together. I didn’t have the least idea what to say so I kept quiet, but Erma said, “Steven, Ruth is about to become your wife. She’s going to be the mother of your children. Show some respect for her wedding day.”

Steve made an odd sound at the back of his throat.

“You’re right. I’m sorry. Good night, Ruth. I love you, honey. I’ll see you tomorrow at the courthouse. You’ll be the prettiest girl in town.”

He turned and walked under the leafy silhouette of the gateway trelis. Gladys followed him into the house and the door closed. Although we strained to emanate camaraderie, Erma drove back to the Hess place in silence. She walked me into the house and settled me in the room. It was clean and quiet. I locked the door and sank in under the quilts but it took a long time to fall asleep.

I awoke to a light knocking and the sisters’ voices, saying my name.

I opened the door and they came in like water.

“What time is it?”

“Nearly noon.”

They stood back to assess. I imagine I didn’t look too attractive.

“Let’s get you dolled up,” one of them said and they went to work.

I knew that a family lived here but either they were very quiet or they had gone out. The house seemed empty but for small clanks and quiet steps wherever the kitchen was. Erma escorted me to the bath, drew warm water, handed me clean towels. I would have enjoyed the luxury but everything was awkward. My skin tingled with anxiety. I felt like a rank intruder.

I came out of the water and made a long consideration of my stomach, swelling but not so much as to transform me. I had been grateful to feel no real sickness, which had probably helped me forget for hours at a time that I was pregnant. Now I thought about the tiny human inside of me. I pictured a white larva, a featureless wasp, which is silly to me now so many years beyond. Ronnie was bright and sensitive, no sting in him at all.

I raised both my palms to eye level. The children lines suggested many offspring. Six or maybe seven. I could hardly picture that. But only two were distinct. Flames shot through my line of sight. Behind them a



dark wall. Beyond that—something else. I forced a wave of hard refusal backward through my skull. *Best not to try to read your own destiny*, the woman in Bill had told me, conveyed through the closeness of our minds. *Your gift is for others*.

Not that they'll appreciate it, I came to understand. Everyone wants a telling. But nobody hardly ever is willing to accept what's told. We spend our lives arguing with our own tales. Doesn't matter if we're reading them forward or back.

Stella Jeppson Porter: Now I recognize the little girl. I believe it's Gladys. She looks strange to me but it's hot in this car and my mind is unsettled. How could I not recognize my own daughter?

"Your hair's gone straight in this heat."

She looks at me, quizzical.

"I almost didn't recognize you," I prompt and she says, peevish, "It's all right."

"Your father couldn't bring himself to come. He'll compose himself for the get-together."

The child bites her lip.

"Fred has to consider his standing in the bishopric. How can he counsel other people about their children when his own are disobedient?"

Gladys here seems too young for this kind of talk. I nudge the parts toward congruence.

"Are you ready to go in?"

I had intended to see my last child sealed in the temple to a faithful wife. But here he is with that Gypsy. "I don't understand. I had a dream. It wasn't supposed to turn out this way."

The dream returns when I call it to mind, bright and identical. I have come home to Cache Valley to see my mother. I stand at the fold where the valley floor bends abruptly into mountainside. I can't tell whether it's winter or summer. The landscape is blue and white like

December yet the grain rises up from the snow, a warm butter hue. I admire a herd of elk, regal and enclosed in their animal perceptions. A Shoshone encampment curls thin smoke in the distance but they neither frighten nor take notice of me.

I am home to my mother, and I am child again yet wife and mother and because I am a child, my father may be here. Immediately it is so. He's been here all along, just above me on the slope, looking in the same direction and directing my thoughts. He is tall and bearded just as I recall him. He has been guiding me and he says, "Look!"

I don't need to turn my head to see where he points. My sight follows his south through peak and pass toward Devil's Gate. The route is obscured but I know it well. I follow my father's spiritual sight. Together we watch a young man stride the mountain pathway. Swift and sure he comes our way, gaining distance like a traveling angel. He revels in the gliding motion of this journey.

At the high mouth of our valley he stops, sensing my beloved papa and me dead and living, vital and decaying, here and already gone. The young man smiles, luminous, and hails us with a call and waving arm.

My father cries out, "Forty-one. Too soon! I was only forty-one!"

Instantly the young man is with us, transported across the valley at celestial speed.

I explain. "It was appendicitis. No one understood until it was too late. The doctor went home to sleep. This man is my father."

My father says, "This man is your son."

"But I already have a son."

"Surely that's not all."

I awaken. I awaken my husband. Fred sits up abrupt and very surprised.

He answers, believing.

He comes.

Steven Porter: We stood in the foyer. Just Ruth and me. Ruth in her blue dress. My sisters had done her hair up pretty but it made her unlike herself. Besides, she looked tired and a little haggard which made me feel guilty for putting a child in her. Women live completely different lives from men. Coupling brings us together and then holds us forever apart.

Old Mrs. Hertig tap-tap-tapped on her typewriter, pretending that the room wasn't a pressure chamber. The telephone rang. Mrs. Hertig picked it up, chipper. "City hall."

The voice on the other end said something to make the old lady glance in our direction, then quickly take up a pencil, feigning insignificance.

"Well, alrighty...of course. I understand. I'll tell Judge Harrigfeld. No, he's got nothing to press him. He'll be here... Okay, we'll be watching for you." She carefully put down the earpiece. Mrs. Hertig composed herself, enjoyed a smug moment, and then spoke to us.

"Steve, honey, that was Erma. She says they're on their way. Leaving the house in just a few minutes. Seems there's been a delay."

I took Ruth's hand and led her to the foyer bench. I knew the old biddy was pleased. I knew that everyone in the whole town was picturing, one angle or another, Steven Porter and some Pocatello chippy out in the long summer grass, sowing wild seed. Taking what solely belongs to the grim-lipped Puritans in their restricted rooms.

We listened to the ticking regulator on the wall. Mrs. Hertig went tap, tap, tap. Tap.

We heard tires on gravel. I left Ruth on the bench and stepped out to see Erma and Gladys. In Eugene's truck. They got out lipless and picked their way toward me in their fancy shoes. Neither acknowledged me until they were up the steps. Gladys pushed stray hair back into her hat. Erma dropped her bottom lip and glared at me as if to quell my question before I could ask it, and then she answered it anyway.

"Daddy and Mother aren't coming."

Several cars went by before I said, "What's that again?"

"Steve, let's just get this done and make the best of it."

“My own parents won’t come to my wedding?”

“Steve, please. You know it’s too much for them.”

“What’s this about respect for my wife on her wedding day?”

Gladys said, “Well, that’s why we’re here. I know it’s dismal but we came, didn’t we?”

We all stood wooden, restraining our sharp Porter tongues. I held my breath while I walked out to the asphalt shoulder. I stared out toward the Tetons, struggling to control my mind. I forced back the burning edges. I knew Ruth was sitting pale and still on the foyer bench. My sisters hovered on the porch. Eventually Erma pushed herself in through the doorway to greet her impending sister-in-law.

I walked back toward the building. My head was filled with helium. Gladys said, “Oh. My goodness! Look!”

The Buick, coming our way. Everyone on Main Street turned to watch its grinding progress, painfully slow, over-powered in second gear.

If we all wanted to avoid a public spectacle, this was no dice.

“Is that Mother?”

“Mmm-hmm, I believe so.”

Our mother cranked the wheel to her left, crossing the lane and mostly navigating the driveway. The front wheel caught the curb but she sustained speed enough to clear it, crushing a lovely patch of city hall marigolds. The Roadmaster kept right on coming at us and then killed all of a sudden, rocking on its chassis. Mother wasn’t exactly in a parking stall, but she was definitely in the lot.

We stood dumbfounded.

Erma pushed open the door. Ruth and Mrs. Hertig peered over her shoulders. Citizens leered from the sidewalks and storefronts. None of us said a word as Mother, still inside the car, adjusted her hat and gloves. She checked her hair in the rearview mirror and shot the city hall an apprehensive glare.

“Go, Steve,” Erma said, and I snapped out of the community trance. I loped down to open the door, bent downward and craned my neck to face her as I offered my arm.

“Mother! What in the world are you doing?”

She took my arm and stepped out, doggedly sedate.

“What do you think? I’m attending my son’s wedding.”

I walked her up the stairs, meeting my sisters’ rounded eyes with my own and then Ruth’s tight-jawed wonderment. Mrs. Hertig exclaimed over Mother, and now all of us as if we were showing up for a jovial church dinner. She hurried down the hallway to find old Harrigfeld. He came out in his white shirt and tie, pushing his arms through his suit coat, caressing it downward with his palms as if it were going to lengthen.

“Fred on his way?” the JP asked, and when nobody answered he swallowed a couple of times, throat protruding. “Well, alrighty then, should we get this affair ironed out?”

Harrigfeld took stock of my mother and sisters, then turned to examine me as if I were a used car. I’m sure we were both recalling an earlier appearance I’d made back when I was fifteen, a swimming-while-truant incident. I may have been inebriated. Possibly buck naked. Back then I mean. But Harrigfeld judged me now as salvageable I suppose, because he said, “Steve? You ready? How about you introduce me to the little lady, here?”

Ruth blushed. She held her hand out, limp. I said, “This is Miss Ruth Loveday, my fiancée. About to be my wife.”

Harrigfeld gave her a quick distasteful appraisal.

“Who’s doing the witnessing today?”

Gladys stepped forward. “I am.”

Mrs. Hertig said, “Well, we need two witnesses as per the law of the State of Idaho.”

I looked toward Erma but it was my mother who said, “And so am I.”

The man made short work of us and we were married. Gladys signed her name all pretty on the certificate. Mother's hand shook as she took the pen, but she wrote out her whole name in old-time Spencerian hand: Stella Marie Jeppson Porter. She gained resolve as she went, finishing with a flourish and a haughty frown for Harrigfeld. Once he'd finished the dirty work the man got jovial and confidential, sending us out the door with, "You understand of course, real marriage is only in the eyes of the Lord under heavenly authority. Not these mere legal pretensions. I look forward to seeing the two of you in the temple in a year or so. Miss Ruth, I'll be the first to congratulate you."

"Mrs.," said my wife. "Mrs. Steven J. Porter, if you please."

I took her hand. Erma seated herself in the truck and Gladys put herself behind the wheel of the Buick. I set Mother in on the other side. Ruth and I stepped into our borrowed coupe and we all drove home in caravan.

My noble father, probably exhausted by sole care of Mae for the last two hours, opened the front door for her the minute we pulled in. She tumbled out with her usual sideways gait. "Stevie Weevie! Steeeevie!"

But she stopped at the trellis when she saw Ruth. Mae threw her arms high, waving them like seaweed. "Here comes the bride! Here comes the bride! The bride is here! Did you get married Stevie? Is Ruth your wife now?"

"Yes, of course she is! Say hello to your new sister-in-law," I suggested extra loud so my father would hear. I looked toward the house. The doorway was open but empty. My father had fled to the barn.



### From "Tooele Valley Threnody"

*Untangling a knot in the family record for my mother, I realized that twin sisters had married brothers in a poignant sequence of tragedy and salvage. It went like this: Millicent Lindenberger married Silas Sprague in Olive Green, Ohio, 1818. She died within six months. Her twin sister, Barbara, married Silas a few years later; he was killed by lightning on the day their first child was born. The younger Sprague brother, Festus, married Barbara when his brother's child—a daughter, Rosamond—was about four years old. Festus and Barbara had several more children, joined the Mormon faith, but did not migrate west until both were well into their fifties.*

Millicent: When I try to rise it is from beneath, or behind, the frigid hold of fever. Secret ice rising from the black swamp draining. The steaming summer green.

Even so I am filtered through the waning bones of Barbara Ann, who was my own body and not. Our distanced deaths finally only one, as was our birth. In Barbara my image extending, flesh, womb, muscle, bone, our long brown hair graying on her aging head, her long years depleting our youthful height.

I was the prettier one. Folks remarked how perfectly we were twinned, but in truth and to our separate grief, the men who courted us began with her. Stronger features, or a stronger soul behind them. I was bashful. She attracted them first, but then the young bachelors turned to me, soothing their impetuous inclinations. Something about my sister—her frank replies, her gaze forthright like a man's—made even Silas fearful, and so the shift, a turn of eye and heart to softer me.

I married Silas Sprague on the Ohio frontier in the same season we arrived to join his family, who were also ours. I was almost eighteen and he twenty-four. Barbara stood as maid, never allowing an emotion.

I would speak something for Silas but as wife and husband we were too brief. I was in a state of becoming, too new to know myself. In Ohio country in 1818, a young woman might die by bear or cougar or wild hog. She could be taken by miscarriage, heavy weather, even Indian

attack, although by now this was old fear more than likelihood. Vapors rose up from the ancient swamps as the men dug drainage. Cold fever stalked the settlements, and although Olive Green was set high and known for healthy air, still the malady could find its way. It courted those of courting age, stalked young parents in their prime, left the little ones and old folks bereft. It seized us in summertime, set us to melancholy and emanations of horror. Cold fever blued the skin, seeped inward to the vitals, freezing us in the midsummer heat.

Barbara: I mourned the loss of my sister twice and in quick succession, the second time so awful that recalling the wedding became a source of comfort. Silas vanished into the uncleared groves and worked himself to insensibility. Our mother descended into a long twilight of half-remembrance, a middle place between living and living dissolution. In Mama's mind, Millicent had never disappeared because the copy stood before her daily. She called me Barbara Ann, or "Melisaint," or even the names of her four sisters, dead one by one in Providence, each by fifteen. To my mother until she died, I was the bodily sign of never-occurred. Never-twisted, never-frail, never-grimaced, never phantasmic.

Silas swore he was marrying me, not some resurrected sister, on our wedding day. Our families had been commingling for so many generations it was inevitable. The family temperaments were compatible, a web of support and relation. Yet I had been taken for so many others, and I had recalled so often that Silas had chosen my sister first, that I made my vow in a disposition something like resigned, something like hopeful. Silas looked older than he was but it became him, and my mother murmured, "Praise the Father hallelujah." Christopher slapped him heartily on the back, and my sweet cousin Festus, now brother-in-law, kissed my cheek in congratulation. My sister Mary and her fat husband Pompey Mason, notorious for never confessing Christ, hosted the celebration and by the late night it truly was an occasion of joy and restoration.



By May I was heavy and due to deliver. Rhoda and my sisters sat with me while Mama rocked in her own personal night, although it was broad day. Silas seemed nearly joyful, although restrained, and late afternoon he went out for the midwife. He took his gun for the sake of habit, slinging the long barrel over his shoulder. I heard his black horse pivot in the hard dirt and sensed the first low rolling of thunder. Mary stood at the door and told us the storm was a good way off. We waited, and night fell, and we waited yet, but the storm and the baby did not. Mama came to good enough sense when Rhoda took her by the arm and showed her the crowning, told her to warm linens. I called for Silas and my daughter came, but not the midwife, and never again my husband.

Festus: She was beautiful, the one I loved, strong and ready for the long life ahead. The little girl was bright and fierce. When I found the courage to ask Barbara to marry me she said, “Festus, we’ve been easy between the two of us since we were children. I imagine we can make a good life together.”

The wife I had always longed for. At the cost of my brother, her husband.

Rosamond: I called him Pa, never queried after the other, but for one day. When I was twelve years old, I asked, “Can’t you tell me something to make him true to me?”

And Festus said, “Come on then.”

He reached to the hook, took a straw hat, put it on my head. “He was plenty real. This was his. Now it’s yours. Let’s walk.”

We set out beyond the road into the forest, dark and dappled and down a path he said was once open and bright as it led to the old midwife’s place. In my later life I might forget for months about that day with my almost father—my father’s brother—walking the overgrown path under the summer-straw hat of Silas Sprague. But then, even until

my old age, the scene would come back very sudden, as if I were a thin girl again returned to a vanished world. We walked up a small rise to an open spot, just big enough to be a meadow. Festus strode to the center. Turned around and watched me come to him. "There you are, walking his same road. He never reached the midwife, so we know he was coming this direction."

I approached, stood with him where my father was struck. I said, "I keep trying to make some meaning of it."

"We all do. None of us can stop ourselves. When we found him the ground surrounding him was written on, like an Indian picture. The very same marks down his back and leg. Folks call them lightning flowers. It's the natural work of electricity but even so I'm overcome by a sense of significance. Like signs in a language I can't read. How could it mean nothing at all, to be electrified the very day his first child coming?"

We stood in the meadow, the light perfectly transparent. Air blue and yellow together. That sweet true note of the redwings. Pound of a peckerwood. If Festus hadn't stood there and told me, the meadow would never have revealed a thing, no matter how long I stood, no matter how many times I walked along my father's path. The meadow lay shining, as if everything could only ever mean itself. Nothing else.

Festus said, "His horse was still standing there. Looked the same, but turned out he was addled. Couldn't recall how to chew grass or drink water. Didn't run, but didn't know us, either. Couple days later we understood and put him down."

Silas: Never learned whether son or daughter, quick or still. As I rode I spoke to myself, a hard talking-to. Shouted out loud that I had to come back to the human race. I was young, not old. I was about to be a father; I truly hoped a gentler one than mine, a stalwart man and unyielding. I shouted out to myself over the thickening atmosphere, the pounding

hooves, "This is your child coming! Your wife in throes you caused! Rise up and return to life and season!"

An answering strike. And now, the emphatic dark.

...

Barbara: Somehow the Mormons caught him on the right day. I was on my knees, not praying but pulling weeds from the kitchen garden, when I saw them approach. I smiled to myself, knowing Festus would tip his hat and turn his back, but something the older man said caught his attention and my husband started as if he'd been struck from above. He leaned in listening. He gestured with his right hand toward the sky, bringing it down, pointing there, there, and there at the ground around his feet, redrawing the jagged lines. I had never seen nor heard him tell that story but I knew exactly what he was portraying, line by line. I shuddered and went in with my dirty hands.

Of course I had not seen Silas fallen in the meadow. The hard truth of that view belongs to his brother, who went to retrieve the body as I nursed my baby daughter in her conception bed. That night my own image of Silas was seared immutable upon my mind: timeless, transfigured by a blinding bolt to gleaming glass. Vertical and naked: smooth hard suspension over the wreckage of mortal flesh. In my diminishing dreams, even now, I reach to caress.

Festus came in the door with the Mormons speaking of signs and translations, the whole American continent the burgeoning Celestial Kingdom, the ground shining up like crystal, one great Urim and Thummim. Festus was a good man but in his manner timid. Silas the better lover, Festus likely the kinder father. Festus intelligent and esteemed but inconfident in his personal wisdom. But on this day he stood with his brother's stature and a burning conviction. Our last child rolled inside me eager to arrive. And everything changed for us.

Rosamond: I was seventeen and strong-willed and I wanted nothing to do with the grand immersion. I had appointed myself defender of the old order, speaker for the lost. I fancied that somehow I was not only the child of the electric man but also the daughter of my mother's twin sister, dramatically young and obscured in the emerald secrets of the old wilderness. I sat on the bank of Sugar Creek to watch the usurpers go under the water and rise up Mormon, filled with the Holy Ghost and ready to hold forth in prophecy. I may have wished in some deep portion of my mind that the Latter-Day Spirit would release the tongues of my wet people, that my parents could speak some fiery truth in the voices of the dead who haunted them, but the one revelation of the day was my mother's condition; when she came up, the water showed her contours.

I watched my sisters Lucinda and Eveline lifted from the symbolic grave, silly and shrieking although Lucinda acquired an air of almighty importance soon enough. Little Fess went down and came up calm and decided, harbinger of the man he intended to be. Edwin hated the water after nearly drowning as a tyke, but he would not be outdone by William. They went under together and came up gasping the same way they were born, in quick succession. The littlest girls, Emily and Dorcas, played near me on the bank in the Indian summer light until our mother was dry and put together. I maintained a stone countenance but I soon realized I was in no temper to align myself with the townfolk, either.

People in Olive Green were stunned and censorious. Any time we came nigh, familiar faces smoothed themselves to taut inscrutability. Neighbors and old friends and even family patronized my mother as if she had lost her wits. Aunt Mary and Uncle Pompey affected an ironic little air of toleration and townsmen stopped conversing when Festus approached. They would greet him and feign camaraderie but yield no personal or communal confidence. One local wit behind me at the mercantile said, "Your ma's plenty enough for one man to handle, ain't she? What's got into that Festus Sprague? That old man got the stamina to be Mormon?" and everyone laughed but Willard Green, recently come

down from Chenango and just then stepped in from the street. Willard so big he looked like a brown bear had ambled in, and he said to me, “Lady, you need me to knock the stamina clean out of this jackass?”

...

Festus: So many have told embellished tales of their journey from the soft green of the East to the hard blue West. Immigrants to Utah clung to tales of hardship to make themselves heroes and visionaries. Believed they were owed something for it. All I have to say is, America is a broad continent and we were grateful to witness a long stretch before the railroad changed it forever. Barbara and I were fifty-seven and fifty-six, too old for such adventure but the trail was established. Our children were grown and strong and made it mostly easy for us. Barbara seemed relieved to depart, uncannily young and light in her legs and shoulders. She was joyful to find Rosamond and Willard and their tall boys in Iowa, loaded to accompany us. Barbara loved the nights under the stars and did not fear the sound of wolves in the darkness. She became a woman I had not known nor ever imagined in such a way. After the plains and then the Rockies I believed that the very sensation of Ohio, humid and mulched and rolling in the hue of trees, had been beaten clean out of me. But we do not step so easy from the landscapes of memory. After the first season of adjusting, I dreamed each night in Olive Green, then woke each day to the blinding blanch of the Great Salt Lake.

Barbara: Young Fess rode his horse to Red Butte the evening of our last encampment. I could hardly take the vision in, my beloved son, easy stance in the arid sunset. A white penumbra shone about his head and shoulders from the unearthly back-glow of the inland sea, which did not resemble water so much as a sheet of immense and burning glass.

Festus: He looked like the angel I had been seeking all my life. He came up the trail light in the saddle, a natural cowboy. This was no Sprague my Providence grandfathers would discern. His smile brightened the shade under his wide hat brim. My son, the image of my brother in the new dispensation, dismounted and reached first for my hand in a manly shake, and then a strong pull to embrace me.

We sat long around the campfire, every one of us together there in the desert twilight: each of our children, grown, and our grandchildren growing, alive and vivid, laughing and swapping stories and still more coming. The city below lay visible in entirety like an unfurled map.

We settled in to sleep, one more night in transit under the Big Bear and the Pleiades and Milky Way.

My old mind returned, and I murmured, "Why isn't it Silas here?"

Barbara rolled, a bit laborious, and turned her face toward mine.

"Festus, don't you ever ask me that question again. Don't ask God that question again. Don't ask the prophet, don't ask the scriptures, don't even ask the devil. Here we are surrounded by our children. Rosamond's as much yours as she is your brother's. More. He never spent an hour with her.

"Everyone that matters is here surrounding us. I don't care what anybody says about the coming order. I've seen nothing of it. All I've seen is vanishment. This is you here, not your brother. This is my self, not my sister. If Silas and Millicent wanted this, they should not have gone and got themselves dead. We are Festus and Barbara, warm and breathing right now under this celestial night, shored up by all the significance we have a right to ask for."

Barbara: Next morning we awoke and descended with the rising sun behind us. The long shadow of the mountains pulled off the flat valley bed like a lavender coverlet.

Young Fess had a little cabin nearly built for us in the Tooele Valley, forty miles farther west in a new settlement with an unsettled name, but the year was troubled by the federal march and Indian anger and so the whole town, once Twenty Wells, then Willow Creek, now trying out its new name Grantsville, was evacuated. We waited several weeks in temporary quarters in Salt Lake with Fess and his wife Lydia before traveling a short day west. On that day we followed the arc of the salt-aproned waterline and then took a sharp turn southward to our new home. For a while it was small and rustic living, more like bivouac than habitation, but I confess I was almost regretful that the conditions improved. Something cleansing in my mind about making do.

The more I acclimated, however, the more I found myself trying to convey this strange yet strangely familiar landscape to my dead sister, buried deep in the fertile soil of Olive Green. I worked continuous words in my mind, straining to describe to her the granite fortress of Deseret Peak, its upper walls so sheer the snow could not cling. I had long told Festus to stop dwelling over the dead, but in this distant place Millicent became less and yet more a part of me. Speaking to her was a way of talking myself into clearer states of mind. I tried to explain how the west mountains contoured the bottom edge of sky at sunset, high evergreen forests packed in angular canyons and lining the northward slopes. I described the sheer blue barrier that rose between us and the Salt Lake Valley, cutting into the shifting pools of uncertain shoreline. There was no means to depict, to an unmade girl lost in the deciduous hues of old Ohio, the glittering sheets of shoreline salt, the unrippled mirror of the famous brine lake evaporating in the desert sun, the barren geometry of islands inverted in the depthless mercury.

## Finding God in the Abstract

Hildebrando de Melo and Glen Nelson. *Nzambi (God): Hildebrando de Melo*. New York: Mormon Arts Center, 2018. 52 pp. Paperback: \$9.95.

*Reviewed by Jennifer Champoux*

Hildebrando de Melo is probably not a Mormon artist you've heard of. And that's just the point. Mormon Arts Center<sup>1</sup> co-founders Glen Nelson and Richard Bushman believe that bringing lesser-known artists to the attention of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints enriches the audience and can facilitate a more dynamic engagement with religious art. By the same token, they believe such an exchange is valuable to the artist too. As Nelson explained, "Our thinking is that an NYC immersive experience—even a short stay—could be life-altering for an artist if done correctly."<sup>2</sup> To further those goals, as part of the second annual Mormon Arts Center Festival in June 2018, Nelson and Bushman invited de Melo to New York to create a series of artworks. It was the first artist's residency sponsored by the Mormon Arts Center, and the resulting artworks were exhibited under the title *Nzambi (God)* at the Italian Academy on the campus of Columbia University during and after the festival. The Mormon Arts Center also published an exhibition catalogue that includes fifteen color plates of the artworks, an introduction and essay by Nelson, and an interview with de Melo.<sup>3</sup>

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1. In February 2019, this name was changed to Center for Latter-day Saint Arts.

2. Glen Nelson, email to author, Aug. 21, 2018.

3. Nelson's catalogue essay, "Out of Angola," as well as images of the de Melo artworks discussed were reprinted in *Dialogue* 51, no. 3 (2018): 279–94.



The catalogue is largely successful in accomplishing its twin objectives of introducing de Melo to a new audience and fostering a broader, more globally inclusive definition of Mormon art. Not only does the catalogue showcase plates of the artworks but we also learn about de Melo's personal life and artistic symbolism. Nelson's brief essay in the catalogue, "Out of Angola," focuses heavily on the artist's life experiences, including his birth in Angola, his childhood years in Portugal where he was among the very first converts to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Porto, and his return to Angola as an adult to forge a career as an artist. The interview transcript gives more details and allows the reader to hear from the artist himself.

In terms of enlarging the boundaries of Mormon art, de Melo's abstract art in this catalogue is decidedly different from popular Mormon art styles. It is non-narrative, non-objective, and essentially non-figural. There is no horizon line, and there are written words (including pages of the Bible) pasted on in every direction. De Melo's bold signature, often placed high or near the center of the image, is sometimes all that orients the canvas. There is a sense of movement, energy, and tension in each of the *Nzambi (God)* works. Unfortunately, the vivid, full-color images in the catalogue cannot convey the three-dimensionality of the artworks—the built-up layers of paint, the welded iron, the collaged ephemera—that is so integral to de Melo's work.

Yet Nelson's text adds a further richness to the art by explaining how de Melo's artwork is influenced by both the political turmoil of his homeland and his personal religious faith. For example, Nelson's explanation of *Mustard* reveals that de Melo is using yellow symbolically to represent madness and his forced institutionalization in Angola as punishment for his political art. Similarly, Nelson explains that *VORAX System* is based on the artist's personal acronym for God, capturing what he sees as God's most important qualities. Nelson's text also analyzes the formal elements of this work, including shapes and colors, and shows how they relate to de Melo's objectives.

Readers may have benefitted, though, from deeper analysis of de Melo's style and iconography. For example, there is no real exploration of the use of Bible pages, including why he chose certain passages or used the Kikongo language Bible. Nor is there much discussion of how de Melo's work is informed by other artists and styles. De Melo's art seems to owe a particular debt to the mid-century American artist Stuart Davis, with its references to jazz music (including lines resembling staves or eighth notes in the *Red as Blood* series), flat planes of color, bold lines, and inclusion of words and even objects from consumer culture (such as luggage tags in the *Eye of God* series). Like Davis, de Melo works in a post-cubist style, referencing the collages and sharp angles of Georges Braque and other synthetic cubists, but denying a clear focal point to the image. Unlike Davis and the abstract expressionists who followed him, such as Jackson Pollock, de Melo maintains an emphasis on the center of the canvas, sometimes placing sculpture there (as in *Pre-God*) or in other cases leaving the edges and corners more open and bare (as in *VORAX System*).

Apart from introducing a new artist and style to a Mormon audience, this catalogue implicitly raises certain questions about religious art, including the merits of abstract as opposed to figurative art, the role of the viewer, and the importance of the artist's biography. Featuring an abstract artist in a solo exhibition at the Mormon Arts Center pushes back against the more representational, narrative artwork employed by the Church. Nelson's personal preference for abstract religious art is revealed in the catalogue's interview when he says, "I think these works of yours that have a more abstract basis are better at describing the mystery of God than if you were trying to illustrate Him in some traditional, eighteenth-century European way" (42). The catalogue thus identifies the complex divide between abstract religious art and figurative religious art but unfortunately stops short of adding discussion or analysis of the many issues attendant to that divide.

Nelson does, however, beautifully describe the way de Melo's work can invite the viewer to participate in the act of creation. For example, he explains, "De Melo's 2010 series *Spider* is about shapeshifting, regeneration, the legendary agility of spiders, and by extension, the artist's willingness to reinvent himself, as well as the hope that a nation can do the same. . . . The picture of a spider as a symbol is rich enough, but de Melo presents something more profound: a picture about the spider coming into being with the simple gesture of a line transformed in the crucible of the viewer's mind" (9). Yet, de Melo's artwork is unabashedly self-referential, and this catalogue follows that lead; the artist's experiences, his beliefs, his hopes, and his symbolism are paramount. On the canvas, the mark of the artist, including his prominent signature, confronts us at every turn. Where, then, does all of this leave the viewer? Is there really room left for the viewer to participate as Nelson suggests? Are the deeper levels of this art accessible to the general public?

In a similar vein, foregrounding the artist's biography changes the way we approach and value art, and this can especially be a point of tension in religious art. We might carefully consider what kind of story we tell about artists when they are seen not just as skilled creators but as, in de Melo's own words, "an instrument in the hands of God."<sup>4</sup> This catalogue plays into the heroization of the artist. In fact, Nelson's essay on de Melo follows a pattern of artist biographies, familiar since the earliest ones appeared in ancient Greece. These themes include the display of artistic skill in childhood, the recognition of this talent by an adult who helps arrange for training, the removal of the artist from his family and place of birth (often with a substitute father), triumph over extreme obstacles, the speed of the artist's work, and the artist's

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4. "Hildebrando de Melo: Mormon Artist," [https://www.mormonwiki.com/Hildebrando\\_de\\_Melo:\\_Mormon\\_Artist](https://www.mormonwiki.com/Hildebrando_de_Melo:_Mormon_Artist). This archive of Mormon artists is being compiled by the Mormon Arts Center.

receipt of divine creative power.<sup>5</sup> This catalogue ticks all the boxes and paints a picture of de Melo as a man wholly given over to his creative impulses—working hunched on the floor above his canvases from dawn to dusk, listening to music as he paints rhythmically, “as if [the canvas] were a drum” (3), and producing a monumental number of works in a short period of time. Clearly, some elements of de Melo’s life simply match up coincidentally with famous artist biographies. But it’s also true that these particular elements are strongly emphasized in the narrative put forward, perhaps revealing the influence of popular myths of genius.

Despite these characterizations of the artist, the *Nzambi (God)* exhibition catalogue (which is only available at [www.mormonartscenter.org](http://www.mormonartscenter.org)) is an important contribution to the study of Mormon visual culture. It encourages viewers to think more broadly about artists and styles of art from a global church, to make space for new voices, and to develop a more critical dialogue with religious art in general. And the exhibition was well received. According to Nelson, as of August 2018 “nearly all of the works in the exhibition have been acquired by institutions and private collectors.”<sup>6</sup> Prior to moving into their new homes, the *Nzambi (God)* artworks were on view from October 2018 to January 2019 in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections at the Harold B. Lee Library on the Brigham Young University campus in Utah, where the conversation could continue.



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5. Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979).

6. Glen Nelson, email to author, Aug. 21, 2018.

## Bleakness or a Future with Unicorns?

Ryan Habermeyer. *The Science of Lost Futures*. Rochester, N.Y.: BOA Editions, 2018. 216 pp. Paperback: \$16.00. ISBN: 978-1-942683-60-5.

*Reviewed by Ryan Shoemaker*

As I savored Ryan Habermeyer's debut short-story collection *The Science of Lost Futures*, winner of the BOA Short Fiction Prize, I remembered a quote attributed to Dostoyevsky in which the prolific Russian author underscores the influence of Nikolai Gogol's acclaimed short story "Overcoat." "We all come out from Gogol's 'Overcoat,'" Dostoyevsky boldly asserts. The story—a mordant social satire of a pitiful government clerk vindicating his tragic death by haunting the very government bureaucrats who refused to help him find his stolen coat—has been anthologized, studied, and critically lauded as a classic of the Western canon in that it marks a turning point in the evolution of the short story, blending fantastical elements of the form's emergence from myth, legend, and folklore with realistic elements of what some scholars classify as the modern short story—stories in which the narrator or the protagonist is a complex subject possessing unique perspectives, feelings, beliefs, and desires. In the tradition of Gogol's "Overcoat," Habermeyer's masterful collection feels both primordial in how it draws from a mythical, shared consciousness and familiar in how these stories play out in a modern world where fantastical events unfold around and in the troubled psyches of Habermeyer's unique cast of characters.

So how to approach Habermeyer's collection? My mind kept mulling over that word "science" in the collection's title, imagining it as both an invitation and a key to understanding and interpreting the collection's rich and complex specimens as a scientist might: through a systematic

enterprise that builds and organizes knowledge to develop and achieve a clearer understanding of something.

And as a curious scientist might, my initial observations were at the level of language, how Habermeyer's prose is crystal clear and utilitarian, effectively building intricate characters, evocative settings, and dynamic narratives; however, Habermeyer's prose, at times, delightfully and brilliantly rises to the level of poetry, unafraid to linger on the often passed-over beauty of the quotidian. After the brutal slaughter of a dozen turkeys, Habermeyer provides a lyrical description in contrast to the butchery: "The blood made a handsome drizzle on the snow, cruel and jagged in some places and almost lovingly geometrical in others." In another story, Habermeyer beautifully describes the firing of a pistol at a window: "It made a terrible noise, like a halo being ripped in half. That's the sound when a gun goes off—like a church bell calling after you."

Entering deeper into *The Science of Lost Futures*, patterns of Habermeyer's motifs and preoccupations quickly emerged, so clearly, in fact, that I couldn't help sketching out a taxonomy of a few of them: stubborn, cantankerous, and imposing body parts (and sometimes entire bodies!); characters struggling with fertility or with the burdens of caregiving; humans shedding their civilization and de-evolving into animals.

In Habermeyer's body part stories, the appendages appear mysteriously and supernaturally, eliciting individual and communal existential crises as characters care for and ruminate on the origin and meaning of these displaced parts. In the first of these stories, "The Foot," the titular object, severed and enormous, washes to shore near a town, evoking in the local citizenry sentiments of both mystery and repulsion, some viewing the severed member as hazardous, while for others the foot is a talisman of metaphysical significance, both mystifying and demystifying existence. In "Visitation," a couple, adamant to remain childless, find themselves reluctant and ill-suited parents when the woman's uterus

inexplicably falls out, becoming a needy presence in their lives and ultimately straining their relationship. And in “Unfinished Man,” the young narrator and his father learn something about the inexorable pain of loss when an elderly neighbor, Brother Vance, in a forlorn effort to preserve his deceased wife’s memory, buries her kidneys in the garden to fertilize a crop of parsnips.

Many of these stories grapple with human reproduction, on the one hand as a mechanical biological process, yet one that can also be fraught with mystery and vexing elusiveness as Habermeyer’s characters struggle to conceive, at times going to ridiculous lengths to do so. In “A Cosmonaut’s Guide to Microgravistic Reproduction,” an unwavering and obedient cosmonaut finds himself a kind of Adam-like figure paired with an unwilling Eve as they’re tasked by the “Chief Designer” to circle the earth testing the possibility of zero-gravity reproduction. In “The Fertile Yellow,” a young husband acquiesces to his wife’s folk remedies and onerous coital schedule as they attempt to conceive, pushing the husband to the brink of insanity until everything around him appears as human genitalia. In “Ellie’s Blood,” an older man attempts to distract his much-younger wife from the emotional pain of her miscarriage by purchasing a dozen turkeys. The randy birds, however, become a bitter reminder to the woman of a creative power she doesn’t possess.

Finally, several of Habermeyer’s stories explore the shedding of civilization and its descent into a more primitive state. In “St. Abelard’s Zoo for Endangered Species,” a fastidious stay-at-home mom, on an outing to the zoo with her family, enters the snow leopard habitat to retrieve her fallen purse and is unable to leave when zoo staff mistake her for a feral cat. Her aloof husband, roused to action by her sudden change, eventually rescues her. In “Frustrations of a Coyote,” a down-on-his-luck vet finds existential purpose in guarding a rotting corpse from a pack of ravenous coyotes, but failing, he becomes like the ravenous animals.

But if I could find an even more expansive taxonomy for this collection, I would say that Habermeyer is interested in love in all its distinct varieties, platonic and romantic, repugnant and enticing—yet seemingly always problematic: love blooming within a strict and sterile bureaucratic system, though yearning to break free; love tested and tried in the crucible of the life couples imagine for themselves and the reality of the life they live; love embodied in the possessions (or the body parts) of a deceased loved one; and love that’s a tyrant, the kind, one character asserts, that you can’t live with or you can’t live without.

Reaching the end of *The Science of Lost Futures*, I’m left to contemplate its beginning, that poetic, yet somber, epigraph from English chemist Peter Atkins. Atkins writes: “We are the children of chaos, and the deep structure of change is decay. At root, there is only corruption, and the unstemmable tide of chaos. Gone is purpose; all that is left is direction. This is the bleakness we have to accept as we peer deeply and dispassionately into the heart of the Universe” [[[page number needed)]]. Did Habermeyer insert this as a lens through which to interpret his collection? A world of decay, corruption, purposelessness, and bleakness? Or do the stories in this collection, while accepting life’s entropic vicissitudes, offer up some hope, a pathway to another realm where chaos isn’t the ultimate victor? I tend toward the latter. While love in Habermeyer’s collection is a chaotic and maddening enterprise, it can rise beyond the world of testable explanations and predictions, a physical world subject to entropy, to an enduring realm where the human heart and spirit soar, despite life’s insecurity and mutability. Perhaps the collection’s dedication—*For Jenna, who believes in a future with unicorns*—is a more fitting lens through which to interpret these trenchant stories and their casts of determined, long-suffering characters. While much of life is bleakness, there’s always the hope of a future with unicorns.



## An Astonishing String of Stories

Steven L. Peck. *Tales from Pleasant Grove*. N.p.: Create Space, 2018. 428 pp. Paperback: \$11.66. ISBN: 9781986604239.

*Reviewed by Charles Shiro Inouye*

There is a kind of madness that comes from living in Utah. Its sources are many—tall mountains and vast deserts, the ability to see a hundred miles at a time, the imaginative force of a newly-coined religion that insists that people are gods and vice versa. Informality and a lack of history are other factors. But it is, above all, the silence of the landscape that encourages men and women to overreach the normal limits of sane (or at least civilized) behavior.

That silence is terrible. And so it quickly gets covered over with entertainment, a background track that gets sucked into homes by way of cable and cellular networks. For some, the dry, quiet wind is countered with disciplined religious life that brings hope and meaning. For others, it is easier to turn to drugs and alcohol, to romance and tempting sexuality. Who can endure such honesty on one's own? Who can bear such silence without some help?

Can we say it? What is true of America is doubly true of the West, and what is true of the West is doubly true of Utah. There the imagination runs free, when it is not suicidal. Everyone seems to have an opinion, whether supported by the facts or not. Everyone plants their own bushes and arranges their own stones. Jell-O with carrots is practice for a future of worlds without end.

Given this need to speak into the silent wind, we should not be surprised that Steven Peck, evolutionary biologist and poet, has produced the astonishing string of stories that we find in *Tales from Pleasant Grove*.

These are Utah stories at their best, about life that is as quixotic as fry sauce and chicken-fried steak.

As a hayseed, born in Richfield and raised in Sigurd and Gunnison, I appreciate Peck's fecund imagination. Some of his tales remind me of my own flights of imagination, brought on by too much time moving over the earth at one mile per hour in a grain combine. That said, the best stories of this collection are the ones firmly grounded in a reality that was never meant to be fantastic in any way.

Consider "Sister Carvalho's Excellent Sunday School Lesson." The protagonist is not Sister Carvalho but Yona Lindenstrauss, native of Tel Aviv and a newcomer to Zion (Pleasant Grove, Utah, that is). The daughter of highly educated parents, Yona went to the best schools and became a "programmer in a missile defense unit" (55). She leaves Israel after the Arab-Israeli conflict results in the deaths of two friends, Hanan and Rachel, and after an attack that results in the personal loss of one foot, four front teeth, and a piece of her jaw. Hardly ethnocentric in her Jewishness, she marries an African Arab, Mbaye, and ends up in Pleasant Grove, where she teaches philosophy at Utah Valley University.

Yona likes Utah. She and her husband "attended the Mormon Church not because they believed it, but because they loved their new community and found it the best way to be a part of it" (57). A clerical mix-up results in their being mistaken for another couple, Brother and Sister Carvalho, who also happen to end up in the Pleasant Grove 5th Ward for a much shorter stay. Embraced by a well-meaning (but maybe not so mentally sharp) Bishop Baxter, Yona and Mbaye become fully integrated in the ward as the Carvalhos, people who prove to be more than willing to lend their considerable experience and wisdom to the cause of a stone cut from the mountain without hands.

Unable to convince their neighbors that they are not Sister and Brother Carvalho, they come to accept their new identity as Latter-day

Saints, finding a place for themselves among a friendly, warm people. In her journal, Yona writes,

They seem militaristic and enjoy a kind of performance of military fervor, and yet despite such displays of nationalism, few have actually served a stint in the military themselves or can speak to its reality. It feels strange, especially when the threats they face are distant and indirect. They love to wave flags and shoot fireworks and highly value displays of patriotism yet despise their president and talk much of acts of insurrection—all the while creating mythic figures of their founders who are more like gods than humans. What they know of world affairs seems limited and often wrong—believing things that confirm what they already think and holding in suspicion things that don't, regardless of the evidence.

They often appear simplistic and naive. They are rarely actually threatened, yet seem to be filled with great fear despite living in the safest place I've ever known. There is constant talk of the great evil of the day, but I have trouble getting them to articulate what it is exactly that they are afraid of and they talk vaguely about the family being under threat and evil being abroad. . . .

Despite these strange peculiarities, they are mostly kind and willing to help each other. They care for those in their circle with tenderness and concern. And like all people, love TV and computer games. And I must say when all is said and done, I like them much and am comfortable here. (60–61)

For Yona, life in Utah is a kind of idyllic dream. So when Satan enters Pleasant Grove in the form of a fight between those who use (and sell) Young Living essential oils versus those who prefer Do-Terra, she takes it upon herself to tear this cancer from the body of PL5. What follows is a hilariously absurd Relief Society lesson in which Sister Carvalho (i.e., Yona) separates the sisters into two groups, according to which essential oils they prefer, and incites them to fight each other. She gives

the two opposing Relief Society counselors daggers and orders them to kill each other.

She berates one and all. “I came from a place where blood runs in the streets because hatred has created hatreds upon hatreds that have lasted centuries. I came from horror to a small pocket of peace and safety and you and she pointed to the sister on both sides of the room are trying to make it a place of blood and terror again. I will not have it. So you two fight it out to the death. The woman who survives gets to sell her oil to everyone. GO” (68).

In the end, the women realize they can’t do it. They don’t have it in them to kill. No one dies. Many tears are shed, and all are edified. Sins are eventually confessed and forgiven. Once again, all is well in Zion.

Equally wild and absurd, and also grounded in the reality of Utah life, is “Bishop Johansen Rescues a Lost Soul,” where yet another well-meaning bishop of Pleasant Grove confronts Lucifer Son of the Morning. We get the impression that the vivid materiality of this arresting story could only come from a writer steeped in, on the one hand, a theology of flesh and blood and, on the other, science fiction mixed with perhaps a few too many gothic video games.

Whether knowingly or not, Peck belongs to the Gnostic tradition, where evil is as real as virtue. He revels in the literalism that makes life as a Latter-day Saint something of a surprising advantage when living in a post-human, neo-animistic world with its renewed appreciation of materiality. A familiarity with monsters forms the very heart of the third best story in this collection, “Battle Creek no Kawa Doragon,” where Clara Shirakawa, a Nikkei newcomer to the imaginative kingdom of Utah, discovers an Asian dragon in a creek in the Wasatch range. The story is magical, in the way that much of contemporary Japanese

culture now challenges modern realism and its long reign of patriotic, paternalistic terror.

With these three stories, Peck establishes himself as a leading revelator of contemporary Latter-day Saint life. Especially when bringing his full range of imaginative powers to the task of social criticism, he excels. As for the rest of the volume, which is a whopping 415 pages long, I must say that Peck writes best when he writes long. Many of the shorter pieces are fragments in need of either completion or deletion. From an ecological point of view, a shorter book would have been more tree-friendly. From a literary point of view, it would have been more effective.



## Mere Tears and Torrents, Signs and Seals: The Sweet Semantic Everything of *Troubled Love*

Matthew James Babcock. *Four Tales of Troubled Love*. New York: Harvard Square Editions, 2019. 245 pp. Paperback: \$22.95. ISBN: 978-1-941861-62-2.

*Reviewed by Jonathon Penny*

*Out of the sighs a little comes,  
But not of grief, for I have knocked down that  
Before the agony; the spirit grows,  
Forgets, and cries;  
A little comes, is tasted and found good;  
All could not disappoint;*

*There must, be praised, some certainty,  
If not of loving well, then not,  
And that is true after perpetual defeat.*

—Dylan Thomas, “Out of the Sighs”

If Matthew Babcock’s *Four Tales of Troubled Love* is about something, it is about private worlds; the reconciliation of self and other; the reckoning of what two people are with each other, without each other, and with the people that made them and that they make in turn; the luke and warm compromise of to-be-with-you and as-I-am.

Each tale is a deft, revealing, merciless, and tender-hearted portrait of the love it tells: of marriages, of persons within families, of families within families, of the mild terrors natural to devotion, and of the queer and queasy relief that follows such terror; of the awful calms that augur storms, and of the troubles incident and consequent to love. Each is uncanny in its perception, earthy in its presentation, and deeply poetic in its execution.

Some wag—Babcock or his editors—has subtitled each tale on the back cover with Italian musical notations, and they are delightfully apropos.

“Help Phone Thirteen” is “playful with notes of mystery,” featuring a “MegaMart” clown and a network of guardian anglers: fishers of folk bent on brightening troubled lives through the cryptic dispensation of hard-won wisdom. It addresses the banality of infidelity, especially the near-miss. It examines the crisis forced, the hard and hapless anger of love, and the heroic obligations of domestic life. It venerates the going on anyway, the chaos of truth, and the attendant sorrowing unto sorrowing unto forgiveness. It reveals the real magic of domestic living, the miracle born of the need for it, the terrible secrecy of being-married-and-a-self.

“Meer, Tarn, Water, Fell” is “a measured but fiery march” up an English hill amid Dutch curses. It portrays the violence of the broken soul, the confusion of love languages, the bitterness of Babel tongues and hearts. It reminds us that hope is lunar, not solar. It satirizes the

inevitable splitting of hairs, the cross-currents of knowledge and speculation, the semantic everything, and the dark truth that the lover makes all love in his own image. But it also reminds us that there is healing in the hurt, promise in the promises, and that marriage is “hoop heavy” with it all, and all the time.

“Impressions” is “impassioned,” both in the ground of marital love and its collapse. It shows us the severance and the equal, awful link between thought and action, between impulse and impotence, between habit and horror. It lays bare the competing powers of familial connections: parent-sibling-spouse-child. It warns us that whatever we may think, our histories and perceptions are folded over and into each other, like all matter and memory. It mourns the obstinate silence of heaven.

“The Seal” is “heroic (but not too heroic)” and advocates accepting both blessing and punishment. It celebrates the beauty of domestic love and its vocabularies of word and gesture, and the glory that such a thing exists at all, however tentative it may be. It celebrates, too, the nothing done, the never on time, the heroic hanging on until the other gasps above the waves, and then the inevitable sinking of my-turn-to-drown: she in the river, and he in the sea. It wonders at the blowing of gaskets and insists on the fixing of seals, at the sanctification of the domestic and the domestication of the saint.

The love in each is troubled in different ways—by distance, ignorance, pride, mental illness, the vagaries and varieties of personhood, failures of imagination, failures to communicate, errors of perception, or in-laws. In all but “Impressions” we are thrown into the troubles in full toil and bubble to watch as they reach a darkly comic, bitterly Shakespearean fever pitch of veiled opportunities and false assumptions making the usual asses until they are unwound, or the mysteries cease to matter, or the partners surrender to each other’s love.

“Impressions” works in the other direction, winding up rather than down, and here Babcock deprives us of comedy altogether. But everywhere else we’ll smile as often as we frown, and laugh as often as

we cry because these are deeply human stories, as chaotic and absurd and beautiful as our own.

The poetry of *Troubled Love* is saved for “passions”: streaks of wordless grief and articulate fear, largely in the mouth of the narrator and the minds of the characters he rides, or for a deep, image-rich alertness of place and context and objects that absorb or reflect the weight and wildness of the troubles. For example, again in “Impressions,” the narrator describes the life and time that winds around a bottle washed up on a beach, far from the events of the story but whose contents are bound up in them. The passage is “typical,” if anything is, of Babcock’s style, tongue-cheeked but somehow *right*. I’ve structured it here to foreground the nimble, arrhythmic pulse of the thing:

A black-naped tern lands near the bottle and  
pecks the glass, *tink-tink*.  
The tern flaps away, and  
a yellow fiddler crab fails twice to scale the bottle but  
after an hour finally clamps a choke-hold on the neck and  
like a window washer ogling a bikini ad on a billboard stares at the  
note inside.  
In the sizzling heat the crab enters a phase of stillness then slips,  
dangles by its claw,  
drops to the sand,  
and sidles away. (149)]

I look at it now and even I wonder why it stood out so: a window-washer simile is hardly high art, and the stubbornness of the crab’s struggle—reminiscent of Woolf or Golding—feels peculiar at best. But there are truths appurtenant and plenty in these few lines, relevant to more than the deep sense of isolation and fragility the whole scene produces.

And by golly they must, those window washers, dangling vulnerable in space from tentative points of anchorage, really *see*, straight on, the proper curve and carriage of the beautiful people writ large above our heads! And who but a wife or husband, suspended in the vulnerable spaces of work and domesticity and desire, belayed or cranked or pulled



or hanging by a finger's edge, would look up from the bliss or boredom of work and see, would *really see* the beauty or the blemish of the person they love, or try to love, or wish to love? And who but a writer would think of that, and of its meaning, and roll it into bottles and crabs and cramps and seizures and then into resigned sidlings away?

The main characters are men, altogether different from each other in temperament, appearance, and background: all desperately "in love" with their wives, all some way in awe of them, but all struggling, as men often do, with the blurring of the lines between self and selflessness, the fine line between the assertion of one's will and the right of another's, the deep negotiation essential to partnership.

Thankfully, Babcock avoids the patriarchal monovision of, say, McEwan or Hardy, where women and children are mere extensions or functions of the men. Babcock is at pains to breathe life into every character. We do, however, encounter the women and children largely *through* the neurosis, desperation, humiliation, fascination, exasperation, affection, and devotion of the men. But this tells us more about the husbands than it does the wives, and that feels very intentional. Even then, the women resist definition: surprising their husbands, fleeing them, loathing them, loving them unexpectedly, and bewraying private lives and longings of their own; as fraught, as desperate, as neurotic and, in every case, as devoted.

All the characters speak in startlingly private vocabularies and personal grammars, in family idioms and marital codes: with knives and forks and liquid tongues. Each situation feels as if it really exists and is familiar (sometimes painfully so); each relationship is rendered with its own realities and rhythms, as if possessed of a built-in history, revealed organically if sparingly, selective and fulsome and clear.

"The Seal" opens with just such an exchange, but because we're not yet oriented, we might be forgiven for thinking that "the woman from New York City" seated on the plane next to "the man from Idaho," watching with aggravation as he fiddles nervously with a kitchen timer

and muttering “Smash that damn thing, or I smash you,” is a stranger to him, however sudden or cruel we might think her in her impatience or nosiness (219). After all, she’s the woman from New York City, the “flight is full,” the narrator offers no indication that the two are linked, and we’ve all watched or looked away from some unknown wriggler or fidgeter or mutterer with whom we’ve been thrown together in the misery of public conveyance.

A page later, however, we discover she is his wife, and then we realize that only a married couple—and only a married couple in crisis—would speak this way: with the familiarity and intimacy of strangers. This makes immediate, ironic, funny, and depressing sense to us, even as it distances us temporarily from the couple. But in all the stories, and most notably in “The Seal,” after throwing us *in medias*, Babcock does us the favor of working backwards, through layers and lines of progression, like an archaeology of how-did-we-get-here?, a baring naked of a deep code, a revelation of scars and warts and nipples and curves and moles and hair and hollow and all the crude and clean accoutrements of lives shared in bodies, hearts, and minds.

These are all written in the rhythms and the grammars of the book itself: seeded and sealed up, earthbound and sacramental, haggard and holy. This is what it is to live alongside someone in the sometime inconvenience of compact or covenant, this beautiful and barren both/and, this determination to love at cost of self, and in hope of its discovery.

So, if *Troubled Love* says anything—if Babcock offers any truth at all—it is this: All love is troubled that is true.

That seems right to me.



## Feminism, Polygamy, and Murder

John Bennion. *An Unarmed Woman*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2019. 294 pp. Paperback: \$18.95. ISBN: 978-1560852766.

*Reviewed by Helynn Hollstein Hansen*

“I’m like Alma’s daughters,” rough-and-tumble ranch girl Rachel O’Brian tells her polygamist stepfather J.D. Rockwell. “Someone has to speak up to you patriarchs” (118). *An Unarmed Woman* is a gripping murder mystery as well as a philosophical treatise on the cognitive dissonance that permeates the Principle in 1880s Utah Territory. Rachel, the title character and first-person narrator, struggles mightily with the expectations her community has placed on her and with her own tempestuous nature. Polygamy is constantly proclaimed in her milieu as divine. Her late mother was J.D.’s fifth wife, and Rachel, who is not yet eighteen, is being pressured to become the third wife of forty-year-old Ezekiel Wright. Nevertheless, Rachel has concluded that polygamy is “a seedbed of injustice, manipulation, and coercion” (139). The story will show her as “unarmed” not only in the literal, law-enforcement sense, but also in her stance as a rebellious, independent woman who is struggling with feelings of confusion and vulnerability.

John Bennion, longtime English professor at Brigham Young University, is probably best known for his contemporary novel *Falling Toward Heaven*, published in 2000. With this historical novel, he now proves himself adept at a describing the complexities of a crime drama in a volatile setting in late-nineteenth-century rural and polygamous Utah. The year is 1887, and four US laws have already been passed against plural marriage. The latest one, the Edmunds–Tucker Act, threatens to “put teeth” into a statute that is already shattering lives of Mormon

families all over Utah Territory. In the community of Centre near the “gentile town” of Eureka, the winter is dangerously cold, federal deputies (dubbed “deps”) are prowling the region on horseback, and husbands with plural wives have been forced into hiding. Several unluckier ones have already been carted off to jail in Salt Lake City. Now, two of the “deps” have been shot dead at their campsite, and their bloody bodies placed in the underground store of Welsh convert William Apollo, who, though (apparently) not a polygamist, is part of the local bishopric. The prime suspects are the harassed polygamist husbands who are fed up with a government that will not allow them what they see as their First Amendment rights in their religious practice. But Rachel, who has followed J.D. on his bounty hunts and learned from his tracking and detective skills, is sharp enough to observe and sense that something does not quite add up.

Meanwhile, amid the shock of the crime and the fear of reprisal from more federal agents, the pros and cons of polygamy are bandied about in the community. Brother Apollo pounds the table: “No Gentile can comprehend the holiness of the Principle. Plural marriage can’t be adultery because the woman is given to the man, belonging to him and to no one else” (33). David Cooper, the local school teacher, hates the Principle and vows to see it eliminated. “Polygamy is an unnatural state. The prophet is a righteous man, but the yoke given to him is heavy. Soon he will throw it off or God will move on without him” (221). David’s fiancée and Rachel’s friend, Naomi, observes that one particular lecherous man “can’t even support one wife. Why would God make him a king in heaven just because he has made many women miserable?” (206). Rachel herself initially admires the essays of writer Emmeline B. Wells, a polygamous wife and a feminist who believes a woman should have a career as well as an intimate family relationship (73). “When I had read her words, I thrilled to the idealistic possibilities of polygamy” (198), Rachel admits. Wells preached that polygamy created a network

of women in a household that allowed each wife more time to herself for developing her mind (12). But after much thought and observation, Rachel perceives that Wells's defense of the Principle does not make up for the pain it causes: "polygamy seems to increase the opportunity for some men to be idiots" (190).

Bennion also fills his narrative with canny details of the period—weapons, horses, food preparation, etc. In chapter 16, his description of Rachel's aching salivary glands during a long fast, especially as she helps prepare—but not yet taste—a family dinner of venison stew, buttery biscuits, jam, and apple brown betty, are particularly vivid. There is also a fearsome shotgun that can kill several ducks with one pull of the trigger, which may or may not foreshadow something sinister. But the thread running through the novel is J.D.'s efforts to find the killer or killers, who, righteously inspired or not, must be held accountable to the law of the land and the community. Rachel is involved every step of the way, sometimes to J.D.'s consternation, as he wishes his stepdaughter would settle down to domestic matters and act more like a lady. J.D. has to admit, though, that Rachel is a natural detective. Will she agree to ride obediently behind J.D. on her hated, back-breaking sidesaddle ("a device for torturing females" [118]) and stay mostly silent while he investigates the murder, or will she speak up about her own astute observations and play a real role in solving the mystery? Even more than a crime drama, this is a story of contradictions and confusion plaguing a community that has been sure enough of its own beliefs to defy the federal government—and pay the price. Bennion has tapped admirably into the spirit of this bewilderment from more than 130 years in the past.



## A Personal Conversion

David C. Dollahite. *God's Tender Mercies: Sacred Experiences of a Mormon Convert*. Salt Lake City: By Common Consent Press, 2018. 324 pp. Paperback: \$12.95. ISBN: 978-0-9986052-6-5.

*Reviewed by Doug Gibson*

Brigham Young University School of Family Life professor David C. Dollahite's memoir *God's Tender Mercies* primarily focuses on Dollahite's conversion, his mission to the Boston area, and his courtship and marriage to Mary Kimball. One persistent theme throughout is that heavenly messengers, including divine beings, guardian angels, and other helpful spirits, are constantly sending us promptings to do things to both increase our spirituality and lead us to those whom God wants us to meet, whether a future spouse, a potential convert, or a new friend. Conversely, Satan is trying to lead us away from righteousness, warns Dollahite, and a failure to follow spiritual promptings causes us to lose potential blessings.

Dollahite was a teen in Marin County, California in 1977, raised in a low-intensity Episcopalian family. He was estranged from religion and cared mostly about tennis, which he intended to be his career. A prompting to read a copy of the Book of Mormon on a home bookshelf led to late-night reading binges, conversations with members, a spiritual manifestation, and baptism.

Dollahite writes in a highly enthusiastic Mormon tone, somewhat akin to Parley P. Pratt's autobiography in its ferocity of feeling. For example, in one passage he describes his spiritual confirmation while reading Moroni 10:3–5. "I felt the same type of wonderful feelings I had felt since I began reading the Book of Mormon, but at such an intensified level of power and depth that I cannot describe. I had never felt such

power and love before. It was as if a river of pure water rushed through me, washing away all my sins. It was also like a raging fire purged away my old self. I felt completely clean and like an entirely new person. . . . I felt loved at the deepest levels of my soul” (11).

After his baptism, Dollahite spent a year at BYU preparing for what became a successful mission, then back to BYU teaching at the Missionary Training Center, meeting his wife-to-be, and pursuing a career.

Dollahite is a talented storyteller, but the abundance of warmth in his prose and his nearly unceasing positivity initially put me off, as I felt something between envy and skepticism. A healthy faith is one that has experienced doubt, sacrifice, danger, and yearning. Some of the most important moments in our spiritual growth are our reactions to adversity. Yet Dollahite hardly broaches such experiences. One dark moment is quickly resolved with a happy ending. The author is devastated to learn of his beloved grandpa’s death. That night, Grandpa appears to him in a dream, assuring him that all is well and that the plan of salvation is true. Dollahite argues that spiritual communications like these are granted to us based on our faith, but I am not sure if that assessment is consistent or fair. I expect that for most, comfort comes through a longer process.

Dollahite can be overwhelming in his frequent references to divine and spiritual experiences. For example, an assigned BYU roommate suffers appendicitis, opening the door for a non-LDS student to room with Dollahite, whom he helps to convert. While he does not openly claim that this was God’s will, he does describe that he prayed fervently for a roommate to whom he could preach the gospel. Other examples of his close connection with the divine include his rescue from an attempt by the adversary to overwhelm him with darkness at the MTC and later, in the mission field, finding a prepared family because his companion was inspired to keep knocking doors even though Dollahite needed to use the bathroom.

Dollahite does admit to frequent doubts and lack of confidence as a convert, and he confesses to several past errors of judgment, such as an overexuberance in following the Word of Wisdom as an early convert.

The Word of Wisdom anecdote is amusing: Dollahite, preparing to apologize to a young woman for earlier condemning her hot chocolate use, learns that he actually “converted” her on the subject.

One painful recollection happened during his baptism when a missionary, during the break after the baptism, played a cassette tape that derided other religions, including his parents’ Episcopalian faith. The incident deeply offended his family and increased their antipathy to his new faith.

Still, good luck seems to follow him everywhere: a manager feels inspired to grab his application from the back of a thick file of job hopefuls; a prompting to attend his future wife’s concert instead of watching BYU football hastens the young courtship; a combination of forgetfulness and tragic weather in India actually helps make a scholarly trip more convenient for Dollahite and his hosts.

Longtime Latter-day Saints will smile at some observations of the still-new believer regarding church basketball, such as prayer before sports or the use of “fetch” and other squeaky-clean epithets by the players to substitute for profanity. Also, there’s the not-uncommon prolonged player tantrum by a prominent local Church leader. In Dollahite’s account, the frustrated athlete was given a time-out and a blessing.

Despite my reservations, I recommend this book. It is a deeply personal memoir of a spiritual awakening, one that leads a boy into manhood. And a second reading, as well as a perusal of my own father’s religiously-themed memoir and writings, softened my initial skepticism. Dollahite, deeply influenced by Book of Mormon prophets, speaks didactically to his grandchildren and further descendants, focusing on spiritual matters over material interests.

As mentioned, *God’s Tender Mercies* tends to overaccentuate the positive, but like Parley P. Pratt’s autobiography, it gets the reader inside the mind of a man who experienced a deeply emotional conversion. Dollahite goes to great lengths to elucidate the experiences that shaped and nurtured his faith. Spiritual matters are difficult to describe, but Dollahite does so in a compelling, entertaining, and often insightful way.





Emily Fox King  
Detail from "Bitumen"  
oil on canvas

## PATIENCE, FAITH, AND THE TEMPLE IN 2019

Margaret Blair Young

My grandfather, Delbert Groberg, was told by his grandmother that a temple would be built in Idaho Falls. In fact, she showed him the land which God had ordained for it. At that time, the LDS Church did not own the property. But Grandpa eventually became a realtor in Idaho Falls and quietly began researching the provenance of the designated land. He sometimes met with owners and negotiated either purchase or donation of the land. My mother was present when the temple's cornerstone was laid in 1940, and again when the temple was dedicated in 1945. She and my dad were married there in 1954, when the endowment ceremony was performed with live actors and included revivalist singing.

I was born the next year, 1955, in Provo, Utah. I remember the 1969 stake conference meeting in which we were asked to donate money towards the building of the Provo Temple. One family donated the money they had been saving for a trip to Disneyland.

The groundbreaking happened on September 15, 1969. Exactly one month later, October 15, 1969, the consequential protest of the Black Fourteen began when Willie Black, president of the Black Student Alliance at the University of Wyoming, proposed a protest against Brigham Young University and the LDS Church's "race policy."

This was our environment in Provo as Herb Albert and Jennifer Warren announced that they would not perform at BYU, and as racist rumors spread throughout the area. It was a fearful, fear-mongering time.

I attended the Provo Temple dedication on February 9, 1972 and was moved by the solemnity of the occasion. The dedicatory prayer

praised God, “the man of holiness” who would make us “unto our God kings and priests.”

Though the prayer was identifiably male, focusing on “priests” without including “priestesses,” and though the 1970s were filled with feminist agitations (including Sonia Johnson’s defiance of patriarchal norms and her subsequent excommunication), these realities did not affect my beliefs. I had my own “Urim and Thummim” (as everyone does) which was my filter and interpreter for all outside events. The framework of my faith was Mormon, and its load-bearing walls were more hymns than dogma. The hymns which most affected my childhood were those which I now have memorized: “I Know that My Redeemer Lives”; “I Am A Child of God”; “Teach Me to Walk in the Light.” Over the years I became aware that there was also a Mother in Heaven, that the name Elohim was plural and that Heavenly Father was surely partnered with Heavenly Mother.

The Latter-day Saint framework was open-ended in many ways. The hymns and scriptures all encouraged imagination, which filmmakers and artists freely used in depicting the Savior, the pre-existence, post-mortal reunions, and mortal intersections with the divine.

When I first entered the Provo Temple to do baptisms for the dead, I was met with a swell of peace. I frankly did not notice the men, but I noticed the women, all in white, all smiling. My eyes filled with tears—something I wasn’t used to at age sixteen. The tears were embarrassing, and I tried to hide them.

Was my response to the temple simply because I had been raised to revere it? Perhaps my upbringing played a part, but my reaction to being inside the building went beyond what cultural expectations could manufacture. My mind, my own vivid imagination opened to the divine.

I was endowed in the Provo Temple in 1979. Its essential vision of mortality as one phase of eternal life was beautiful to me. It was a different endowment ceremony than it would be twelve years later, when significant changes were made. Three new films would debut just a few

years after that, two of which showed women as powerful, insightful, intuitive beings, understanding the necessity of suffering before the dutiful, law-bound men did, recognizing Satanic lies immediately, intuiting the identity of the apostles, dropping their fishing nets (or baskets) instantly when called.

My 1979 endowment was preparatory to my first marriage—a marriage which would fail quickly. I had not learned to identify the signs of misogyny, or conditions like Asperger's. My first husband told me just two weeks after our marriage that I repulsed him. He consistently compared women to cows. He used the word "Woman" like the vilest of epithets. His misogyny was pathological.

I left him after three years. I did what was unthinkable in my family with its long history of long marriages. I filed for divorce. Things I had never thought possible became my reality.

Not long thereafter, I received a letter from the only person in my extended family who had also gotten a divorce—my great Aunt Elaine. Though we didn't know each other well, she had felt an urging to write to me. She said this in her letter:

*Dear Margaret:*

*Many years ago, as I was trying to decide whether to get my divorce, I had a strong sense one night as I was praying of the presence of many of my ancestors, and of their concern for me. There was no attempt by them to make my decision for me. I only sensed their concern.*

*Last night, as I said my prayers, the same sensation came. I wondered why I would be feeling this, and then I realized I was feeling it for you. There are many—both in this world and in the next—who are deeply concerned over you. They do not wish to usurp your free agency or influence your decision in any way, but they love you very much.*

*I felt I should tell you that.*

*Love, Aunt Elaine.*

There it was within this letter—my essential Latter-day Saint faith. My framework. I was a part of a world which transcended time and included angels and ancestors. In addition, the message came through a woman, who understood me because of her own experience. All of it felt maternal—my great aunt and perhaps my many grandmothers.

Regardless of the Hell I had just been through, regardless of the unthinkable mistake I had made in my marriage choice, regardless of how thoroughly I condemned myself, I still believed that I was living part of eternity; that I had lived in a place of love before my mortal life; that I would learn vital lessons during mortality and then live afterwards; that I and all men and women—and all institutions they would create—could change and progress, even after behaving stupidly, believing falsehoods, choosing easy fantasies over hard realities. Though I would soon cancel my sealing to my first husband, the temple remained the symbolic convergence of every dimension of my faith.

I was certainly aware of the temple language which made women subservient to their husbands, though it didn't affect me much even when I was married to a man who expressed his anger through misogyny. I understood the scriptural model: that the Church was the bride and Christ the bridegroom. Nonetheless, I was aware enough of the problems inherent in the gender division that when I served as an ordinance worker in the Provo Temple, I chose which words I would emphasize to let the patron know that her primary relationship was with God, and that she was to serve *with* her husband.

When I went to the temple on Wednesday, January 2, 2019, I had heard rumors of changes. I participated in the initiatory and endowment ceremonies. When I heard the first change—one which removed all wording suggesting that a woman must listen to her husband's counsel—my head jerked up to the ordinance worker, my eyes questioning what she had just said. She smiled and nodded. I had Kleenex in my pocket, and brought it out to wipe my tears. It was not a change I had lobbied for, but I was aware that the earlier wording had been painful for

some women, including some of my friends and one of my daughters. I was profoundly grateful for the new words. The gratitude remained as I noted changes throughout the endowment and later in the sealings. I was also deeply affected during the first part of the endowment, when the creation scene showed people of all ethnicities and from many centuries. Oh, I had longed to see diversity in the garden! I still believe that someday, we will see an African cast. That casting will send a message throughout the Church which will be ripple more widely than the Gospel Topics race essay could. A visual testimony that “All are alike unto God” would move us in strides rather than baby steps towards becoming a Zion people.

I also acknowledge the lovely changes I have seen in the Provo Temple’s art over the past forty years. There are some important pieces which show an African American woman from the nineteenth century; Native American children standing close to the Savior; a black man giving a priesthood blessing to his son, perhaps ordaining him to the priesthood. The art also speaks of the LDS trajectory towards unity and equality.

I am convinced that more changes will come to the temple rites. Besides the inevitable casting of multiple ethnicities in the creation story, I believe that the time will come when “the gods” will include The Mother, perfectly placed amidst the raw essence of creativity and the varied blooms in the garden. My imagination easily allows for these possibilities, though my faith insists on patience. Nonetheless, within temple walls, my imagination is generous, forever unfolding, and expectant. I have long believed that I could learn something new every time I attended the temple. Over forty years, that belief has proved true. I have a general assumption that I will experience a miracle every time I’m there, whether the miracle comes as a message to me or whether I am used as a messenger for another. I never expect anything grandiose, but the miracles (as I define them) have been constant.

I recognize, however, that not all have pleasant experiences in the temple. We are not required to love a sanctuary which is evocative and

inspiring for another. When Church lessons rhetorically ask why some of us don't attend the temple often, the standard, anticipated answer is that we don't carve out the time to attend. Generally, we don't deal with the more common reality: that some people simply do not like temple worship, that they find it strange.

Even with the recent changes, the temple will not be universally inspiring. For some, however, it will be a significant refuge and a place of communion with the divine. I speak subjectively and as a woman in her sixties who has loved the temple for all of her life. Acknowledging that my own experience differs from many others', I here share a few of my temple-based memories.

#### From Guatemala:

Because my father was a Mayanist, we lived in Guatemala during 1975, where Dad taught missionaries how to speak the Mayan dialect Cakchiquel. I returned there six times after our first stay. Through Dad and my own acquaintances in Patsun and Patzicia, I met most of the people who had saved their money for years in order to travel by bus to the Mesa, Arizona Temple in 1966. It was a heroic journey, something which bonded them and created a small community from which church leaders would eventually be chosen. One woman who participated was Rosalia Tum, who told me how impressed she was by the fact that everyone in the temple was dressed the same—Latinos, indigenous people, white people. Nobody appeared richer than anyone else. "There was no difference," she told me in Spanish. Another woman, Josefina Cujcuj, had a warty birthmark around her eye. Though she spoke only Cakchiquel, she agreed to go with me to Guatemala City to see an eye doctor. While we were in the city, Hna. Cujcuj pulled her huipil from her shoulder to show me her garment—gray with age and threadbare. It occurred to me that she had had that garment since her trip to Mesa a decade earlier. The mission president gave her new garments.



### From a Mexican Institute Student:

I taught Spanish Institute for ten years and was frequently in awe of my students. One female student, a Mexican returned missionary, told me with some hesitation—not wanting to make sacred things common—about being deathly ill during her teen years. At one point, she felt she was dying. In a dream or a vision, she saw Jesus, who embraced her and called her by a different name. She recovered from the illness and shared her vision sparingly. Years later, when she went through the temple for the first time, she received her new name, which was the same one the Savior had called her by. She was startled and asked that it be repeated. Yes, it was that name. The Lord knew her and knew details about her life which she was yet to discover.

### Temple in the Congo:

I have been working in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 2014, going once or twice a year to pursue various initiatives. I have found a deeply vulnerable population in my work center—Lodja. Just sixteen years ago, they were at the end of a long war in which militia from five countries had invaded their village, conscripting child soldiers and committing every inhuman act we know happens in wars. The people were demoralized and traumatized. I heard horror stories and frequently encountered people who did not want to talk about it, saying only, “It was death. Death and more death.”

The temple in Kinshasa, DR-Congo will be dedicated on April 14, 2019. It will be a center of service and a place where people who could not even be ordained to the priesthood or enter a temple prior to 1978 will be trained in all ordinances and asked to serve each other.

I am convinced that the temple will bless the entire Congo. Because I am a Latter-day Saint, believing that God, angels, and our ancestors yearn to comfort, bless, and guide us, I am certain that a new day for the Congo is symbolized more by the temple than by the recent presidential



election there. The “armies of Heaven” bring peace and promise to a place where other armies have brought “death and more death.”

The Kinshasa Temple was announced in 2011. In 2014, I stayed at a hotel next to the temple-site property. No construction had started. Negotiations were ongoing. But, like my grandfather before me, I could look at the expanse of land and imagine something. Architects had not yet presented drawings, and there was conversation over whether it should be a large or a small temple. My imagination could not go into detail, but I knew that the land before me had been chosen and would be sanctified.

In 2017, construction was well underway, and we could see the architect’s vision of what it would become.

In 2018, it was nearly finished. Visitors could not go beyond a certain point, so I had no idea of what the interior looked like. A friend and I went to the site, where I suddenly heard my name called. It was Aime, who embraced and welcomed me.

Aime and I have a long history as friends. He was the companion of one of the missionaries my husband and I served in the Missionary Training Center before they left for the DR-C Kinshasa mission. That missionary requested that I email Aime, as his family didn’t have internet, so he was always on his own when the Americans had time at the internet café.

Thus began my friendship with this remarkable Congolese man who had once been in a revolutionary group—and whose story was the foundation for the film we’re wrapping now, *Heart of Africa*. I even helped him apply to BYU–Hawaii—and he was accepted with a work scholarship. However, a month later, I received a strange email from Aime, indicating that his acceptance had been rescinded. He sent me a copy of the letter, which was almost certainly written without oversight, as it was politically unthinkable. It said that the personnel at BYU-H had decided that Africans did not meet “the cultural expectations” of the university, and he would therefore not be admitted.

My activist impulses were instantly triggered. Within a half hour, I had contacted a few powerful people to assist me in responding. I don't know how much trouble my actions caused, how many conversations and admonitions resulted, but I have no regrets.

Ultimately, Aime was re-admitted to BYU-H, on the condition that he be married. His girlfriend's father thought she was too young to marry, and Aime briefly considered marrying someone else in order to go to the university. But after just one day, he let me know that he loved his girlfriend and would wait for her. He sent a remarkable letter to BYU-H declaring that they had presented him with an impossible choice, and he had elected not to pursue acceptance there but to wait until he could marry his girlfriend, Steffy. That bold move was the very thing which showed Steffy that he truly valued her, that he was willing to put his education on hold.

It's hard to ignore the rejection letter's insulting, presumptuous word choice. That letter was written in 2013. In 2014, Aime married Steffy with her father's full approval and the two were sealed in the Ghana Temple. In 2017, Aime sent me this news:

*I am happy to announce to you that I have been appointed to the Kinshasa Temple facility manager position. I will be working for the Temple department. This Job will allow me to visit the temple every week or maybe have my office there. I am so thrilled to start. I will start in July. I will travel to Ghana for two weeks in July, then in Nigeria for other two weeks and in South Africa for another two weeks before going back to Ghana again. I will travel a lot for trainings before the Kinshasa Temple is ready.*

On the temple grounds in 2018, Aime said to me, "I know why I didn't go to BYU-Hawaii. The Lord needed me to take care of His house."

Those of us on the outside might rail against the clear injustice Aime suffered when his acceptance was rescinded, but that was not his focus. He had to wait for his wife. He had to wait for his education (he now has a degree from a university in Kinshasa which is partnered with

Beulah Heights University in Atlanta, Georgia). He had to wait for the temple. Patience and faith were and are his watchwords.

I will be with Aime and Steffy in Kinshasa for the temple dedication. I have seen the waving of palms several times when guests were welcomed into a Congolese village. Palm waving there is not calm. The smiles, the dancing, the spontaneous singing, the irresistible rejoicing is glorious. I wonder if the Hosanna Shout will be a bit different in Kinshasa than it is in the USA. Regardless, I plan on singing and shouting with my friends and with the armies of Heaven as the temple is given to God.

# EUGUENE ENGLAND

## ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS

This year, the committee judging the Eugene England essay contest was impressed by the abundance of beautifully written, thought-provoking essays we received. While the committee selected three winners, they also nominated seven honorable mentions.

First place: “To the Young Bishop who Conducted my Father’s Funeral Service Yesterday,” by Kif Augustine

Second place: “Singing In Harmony, Stitching in Time” by Karen Marguerite Moloney

Third place: “Pando: The Secret Life of Trees,” by Terresa Mae Wellborn

Honorable mentions go to:

“A Liturgy of the Word/Seed: Poetic Diversions on Language, Goodness, and Growth via Alma’s Discourse on Faith,” by Tyler Chadwick

“Call Me by My Name” by Stephen Carter

“Joseph Smith and the Face of Christ” by Robert Rees

“Spirit of Pentecost” by Samuel E. Wolfe

“The Inner-Life of Alma the Younger: A Psychoanalytic Reading” by Nathan Smith

“Called Not to Serve” by Neal Silvester

“The Commandment of Gratitude,” by Amanda S. Williams



Emily Fox King  
Detail from "Mother's Day"  
oil on canvas

## CONTRIBUTORS

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KARIN ANDERSON {anderska@uvu.edu} is a professor of English and Literature at Utah Valley University. Her first publication appeared in *Dialogue* many years ago; this is, for her, a lovely and belated return. She has also published in *American Literary Review*, *Seneca Review*, *Quarter After Eight*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Sunstone*, with Fiddleblack.org (where “Tooele Valley Threnody” first appeared), and (forthcoming) with Torrey House Press. She hails from the Great Basin.

EMILY BROWN is a singer and a songwriter and to wit, a poet, who lives rightly in the city of Oakland, California where she works and studies such things as poetry and the composition of music at Mills College as well as in her daily homeness, sleeps and eats and bakes great and crusty loaves of bread. Her musical life is another life altogether and whereas she has created four complete albums being some a little longer and some a little shorter and listed further are their names and years: *Bee Eater* (2018), *Emily Frown* (2016), *Green Things* (2012), *This Goes With Us* (2011). Performing sometimes in California and erstwhile in Utah her music she sings it and also plays such instruments as the guitar and the piano, growing in her abilities and growing lately exceedingly funny in between the musical numbers while upon the proscenium or stage.

CHERYL L. BRUNO {clbruno@gmail.com} was married once in the Temple and once on the beach. She is the amazed and amazing mother of eight children. Cheryl has worked as an Aquatics Director and currently is a STEM instructor for Fused Learning in Monterey, California. Her writing and research interests are nineteenth-century Mormon history and Freemasonry.

JENNIFER CHAMPOUX {J.Champoux@northeastern.edu} is a lecturer in art history at Northeastern University and vice president of Mormon Scholars in the Humanities. Her writing on religious art has been published in *BYU Studies Quarterly*. She has also taught art history courses as adjunct faculty at Emerson College, Emmanuel College, and Colorado Community Colleges Online, and as a teaching fellow at the Boston Architectural College. She earned a BA in international politics from BYU and a MA in art history from Boston University. She lives in northern Virginia with her husband and three children.

DOUG GIBSON {doug1963@gmail.com} is a retired journalist whose tenure included several years as opinion editor with the (Ogden, Utah) *Standard-Examiner* newspaper. He now reviews business taxes for the Internal Revenue Service. He maintains three blogs, including Mormon History and Culture (cultureofmormonism.blogspot.com). He lives in Ogden with his wife, Kati, and children.

MAXINE HANKS is a theologian and independent scholar of women's studies in religion, who writes about women's history and theology in LDS and Christian tradition, liturgy, and practice. She did her bachelor's in Gender Studies at the U of U, and graduate work in gender studies, history, and religion at the U of U, ASU, and Harvard Divinity School. She has edited or co-authored four books on Mormonism and her articles appear in several books and publications, including *Dialogue*. She served in ministry at Holy Cross Chapel for 13 years before returning to the LDS Church in 2012, where she serves as teacher in Sunday School and Relief Society.

HELYNNE HOLLSTEIN HANSEN {hhansen@western.edu} received her PhD in French from the University of Utah. She is a professor emeritus of modern languages at Western Colorado University and a former visiting professor of French at Brigham Young University. She is a former staff writer for the *Church News* and *Deseret News*. She is author of a scholarly monograph *Hortense Allart: The Woman and the Novelist*, and a novel, *Voices at the Crossroads*. She currently resides in Salt Lake City.

JODY ENGLAND HANSEN {hansen\_home@comcast.net} is a writer, speaker, advocate, mixed-media artist, and suicide prevention trainer. She seeks nuanced, thoughtful belief and is an activist for creating a world where everyone can live a strong, fulfilling life. She seeks to create spaces where a greater diversity of people are speaking love into the face of dogma, removing barriers of bias, and connecting hearts instead of building walls.

METTE IVIE HARRISON {ironmomm@gmail.com} is a critically acclaimed author of several young adult books including *The Princess and the Hound* series and the stand-alone volume *Mira, Mirror*. Her first novel was *The Monster in Me*. She began an adult mystery series in 2014 with titles *The Bishop's Wife*, *His Right Hand*, *For Time and All Eternities*, and *Not of This Fold*. She also penned a memoir, *Ironmom*, after the passing of her sixth child. She is an Ironman competitor and runs



marathons. She received a PhD from Princeton University in Germanic languages and literatures and was an adjunct professor at BYU for a time.

CHARLES INOUEY {charles.inouye@tufts.edu} is a professor of Japanese and the co-director of the international literary and visual studies program.

MELODIE JACKSON {melodiejackson629@gmail.com} was born in Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1995. She is the youngest of eight children. After graduating from high school, she attended Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. While attending BYU, Melodie felt impressed to serve an LDS mission to which she completed her service in the Brazil Rio de Janeiro mission. Upon returning to Utah and studying American Studies with minors in Portuguese and Sociology, she graduated BYU in April of 2019. She plans to pursue a PhD in African American Studies in the fall of 2020. She loves to write poetry, study the gospel of Jesus Christ, understand the meanings of her black female body in various contexts, organize and advocate for her community, spend time with loved ones, and play basketball.

MELODY NEWHEY JOHNSON'S poems have appeared in numerous print and on-line literary journals. Her work has also appeared in the Salt Lake Art Center in the collaborative art exhibit, Ceremonies of Innocence: The Girls Are Now Women. She lives and works as a registered nurse in Salt Lake City where she loves to garden with her husband and build sheet forts with grandchildren. Poetry is her native language.

LINDA HOFFMAN KIMBALL {lhkimball@pobox.com} is a convert to the Church from Chicago. She earned her BA from Wellesley College and her MFA from Boston University. She is a Co-Founder of Mormon Women for Ethical Government and Co-Editor-in-Chief of Segullah.org, an online literary and fine arts blog and journal highlighting the lives and work of Latter-day Saint women. She is an author, a visual artist, and a poet. She currently lives in Woodland, Utah.

EMILY FOX KING grew up in Pasco, Washington. As the middle child in a large creative family, from a young age Emily found expression in the visual arts (in a family with seven children one really has to EXPRESS oneself to get any attention!) Her first teacher was her mother, an accomplished artist, Debra Fox. Career highlights include multiple solo exhibitions in her current state of Utah, as well as being included in the Anthropologie



2018 Fall Home Collection. Emily has exhibited nationwide including New York, California, Florida and Nevada and is collected by many, including the Chris and Janae Baird Collection of Contemporary Mormon Art. Much of her work explores notions of femininity, including domestic spaces and feminized objects. Currently she is working with floral imagery. “I think life, motherhood, womanhood, is a mixed bag of beauty, chaos, uncertainty, anger, and resignation, all in one. In the end it’s freaking gorgeous! That’s what these florals are about” (Interview with Linda Hoffman Kimball, Co-Editor-In-Chief of Segullah.org). While keeping a rigorous studio practice, Emily also teaches painting and drawing at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah. Follow her on Instagram @emilyfoxking and view her website at emilyfoxking.com.

SARA LAKE {lake.saraann@gmail.com} An optimistic possibilian, Sara “Mormons” her own way in hopeful ambiguity. She has lived in San Antonio, Texas for the last decade but calls the mountains and ocean of the west home. She’s a Red Cross medical volunteer on the disaster relief team but spends most of her days juggling six kiddos in a mixed-faith marriage while moonlighting as a lactation specialist. For centering she requires daily sweating, singing, and writing. She savors witnessing and participating in the organic moments of life; exploring and documenting as much of it as she can along the way.

HEIDI NAYLOR {heidinaylor@boisestate.edu} teaches English at Boise State University. Her short story collection, *Revolver*, was published by BCC Press in April 2018.

BLAIRE OSTLER {www.blaireostler.com} is a philosopher and leading voice at the intersection of queer, Mormon, and transhumanist thought. She is a board member and former CEO of the Mormon Transhumanist Association, the world’s largest advocacy network for the ethical use of technology and religion to expand human abilities. She presents and writes on many forums, and speaks at conferences promoting authentic Mormonism. Blaire holds a degree in design from the International Academy of Design and Technology-Seattle. She is currently pursuing a second degree in philosophy with an emphasis in gender studies.

DAYNA PATTERSON {daynaepatterson@gmail.com} is the author of *If Mother Braids a Waterfall* (Signature Books, 2020). Her creative work

has appeared or is forthcoming in *POETRY*, *AGNI*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Passages North*, *Sugar House Review*, *Western Humanities Review*, and *Zone 3*. She is the founding editor-in-chief of *Psaltery & Lyre*, a former managing editor of *Bellingham Review*, and poetry editor for *Exponent II*. She is a co-editor of *Dove Song: Heavenly Mother in Mormon Poetry*. She can be found online at [daynapatterson.com](http://daynapatterson.com)

JONATHON PENNY {jonathon.penny@gmail.com} is husband to one and father to three, and teaches literature, writing, and communications at the Dubai campus of Rochester Institute of Technology, where he also chairs the Sciences and Liberal Arts department. In addition to occasional scholarly pieces, he has published short fiction and poetry, and is the author of *Blessed and Broad*, *These Badlands*, a four-play cycle set in Southern Alberta, Canada. Volumes I-III include *Are We Not All Strangers* (Cardston, 2016), *Diggers* (Magrath, 2017), and *Junction Town* (Stirling, 2018). The last of the plays—*Home/front*—will be produced in June, 2019, in Raymond. Penny is the translator of Jad Hatem's *Les Trois Néphites, le Bodhisattva et le Mahdî ou l'ajournement de la béatitude comme acte messianique* as *Postponing Heaven: The Three Nephites, the Bodhisattva, and the Mahdî* (Maxwell Institute, 2015), and currently serves as president of the association Mormon Scholars in the Humanities.

ELIZABETH PINBOROUGH {eapinborough@gmail.com} is a writer who lives in Salt Lake City. Her work has appeared in *Dove Song: Heavenly Mother in Mormon Poetry*, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, *Exponent II*, and *Fire in the Pasture: 21st Century Mormon Poets*. She edited the book *Habits of Being: Mormon Women's Material Culture*, published by Exponent II. She is currently researching an LDS theology of the body and working on her first book of poems.

DALENE ROWLEY {dalenerowley@gmail.com} An avid reader, podcast listener, and compulsive writer, Dalene feels deeply it is our stories that connect us. Her latest adventures in storytelling have pushed her well out of her comfort zone and smack into poetry. Dalene spent her childhood in the Pacific Northwest, has lived in Belgium and France, and currently resides in Utah, where she works as an instructional designer. While in her heart she wants to learn, do, and be *all* the things, her favorite roles are wife, mom, grandma, sister, and friend.

RYAN SHOEMAKER {shoemakerryan@hotmail.com} Ryan Shoemaker's fiction has appeared in *Gulf Stream*, *Santa Monica Review*, *Booth*, and *The Fiction Desk* (UK), among others. His debut story collection, *Beyond the Lights*, which was a 2015 semifinalist for the St. Lawrence Book Award, is available through No Record Press.

KATHRYN KNIGHT SONNTAG {kavaliere@gmail.com} holds a Master of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning and works as a land planner in Salt Lake City. Her research focused on the role of the transcendent in landscapes and greatly informs her first collection of poetry, *The Tree at the Center* (By Common Consent Press, 2019).

RACHEL HUNT STEENBLIK {rachelelizahunt@gmail.com} is the author of *Mother's Milk: Poems in Search of Heavenly Mother* (2017) and *I Gave Her a Name* (2019), as well as a co-editor of *Mormon Feminism: Essential Writings*. She finished her PhD coursework in philosophy of religion and theology at Claremont Graduate University and has a BA in philosophy from Brigham Young University and an MS in library and information science from Simmons College. She currently lives in Wenzhou China with her family where she mothers, and writes, and teaches the occasional class.

TERRESA WELLBORN {terresaw@gmail.com} has been published in *BYU Studies*, *Dialogue*, *Segullah*, and several anthologies including *Fire in the Pasture*, *Dove Song: Heavenly Mother in Mormon Poetry*, and *Monsters and Mormons*. She has a BA degree in English Literature and a MLIS degree in Library and Information Science. When not on a mountaintop, she prefers to dwell in possibility.

MARGARET BLAIR YOUNG is an award-winning novelist, playwright, and writing instructor. With Darius Gray, she coauthored the historical novels in the *Standing on the Promises* trilogy and made two documentaries: "Jane Manning James: Your Sister in the Gospel" and "Nobody Knows: The Untold Story of Black Mormons". She wrote the play, "I Am Jane," also about Black Mormon pioneer Jane Manning James, which has been produced throughout the United States. Young also wrote the screenplay for *Heart of Africa*, a film directed by Congolese filmmaker Tshoper Kabambi.

# DIALOGUE

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