



DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought

EDITORS

EDITOR	Kristine L. Haglund, <i>Belmont, MA</i>
WEB EDITOR	Emily W. Jensen, <i>Ogden, UT</i>
ASSOCIATE EDITOR	Matthew B. Bowman, <i>Arlington, VA</i>
REVIEWS	Melissa Madsen Fox, <i>Russell Arben Fox, Wichita, KS</i>
INTERNATIONAL	Ronan James Head, <i>Malvern, England</i>
HISTORY	Stephen Taysom, <i>Shaker Heights, OH</i>
SCIENCE	Steven Peck, <i>Provo, UT</i>
POETRY	Tyler Chadwick, <i>Pocatello, ID</i>
FICTION	Heather Marx, <i>Westwood, MA</i>
FILM AND THEATER	Eric Samuelsen, <i>Provo, UT</i>

BUSINESS AND PRODUCTION STAFF

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT	Mariya Manzhos, <i>Cambridge, MA</i>
PRODUCTION MANAGER	Brent Corcoran, <i>Salt Lake City, UT</i>
ART DIRECTOR	Nathan Florence, <i>Salt Lake City, UT</i>
COPY EDITORS	Erika Ternes, <i>Grand Marais, MN</i>
	Libby Potter Boss, <i>Belmont, MA</i>
PROOFREADER	Jani Fleet, <i>Salt Lake City, UT</i>

EDITORIAL BOARD

Mary Lythgoe Bradford, <i>Lansdowne, VA</i>	Becky Linford, <i>Chantilly, VA</i>
Stephen Evans, <i>Seattle, WA</i>	Max Perry Mueller, <i>Somerville, MA</i>
Justin Flosi, <i>Chicago, IL</i>	Michael Nielsen, <i>Statesboro, GA</i>
Richard Haglund, <i>Brentwood, TN</i>	David W. Scott, <i>Orem, UT</i>
Heidi Harris, <i>Rostock, Germany</i>	Ethan Yorgason, <i>Daegu, South Korea</i>
Linda Hoffman Kimball, <i>Evanston, IL</i>	

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Philip L. Barlow, <i>Logan, UT</i>	Val Hemming, <i>Kensington, MD</i>
*Kevin Barney, <i>Chair, Hoffman Estates, IL</i>	Patrick Q. Mason, <i>Claremont, CA</i>
Molly McLellan Bennion, <i>Seattle, WA</i>	Michael McBride, <i>Irvine, CA</i>
Brian D. Birch, <i>Draper, UT</i>	F. Ross Peterson, <i>Logan, UT</i>
Claudia L. Bushman, <i>Pasadena, CA</i>	Gregory A. Prince, <i>Potomac, MD</i>
Sumer Thurston Evans, <i>Seattle, WA</i>	*Karla Stirling, <i>New York, NY</i>
Kristine L. Haglund, <i>Belmont, MA</i>	Morris Thurston, <i>Villa Park, CA</i>
	*members of the Executive Committee

On the Cover: Brian Christensen,
Road Sign, stainless steel, steel,
82" x 75" x 42"

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.

Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought is published quarterly by the Dialogue Foundation. *Dialogue* has no official connection with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Contents copyright by the Dialogue Foundation. ISSN 0012-2157. *Dialogue* is available in full text in electronic form at www.dialoguejournal.com and is archived by the University of Utah Marriott Library Special Collections, available online at: www.lib.utah.edu/portal/site/marriottlibrary. *Dialogue* is also available on microforms through University Microfilms International, www.umi.com, and online at dialoguejournal.com.

Dialogue welcomes articles, essays, poetry, notes, fiction, letters to the editor, and art. Submissions should follow the current *Chicago Manual of Style*. All submissions should be in Word and may be submitted electronically at <https://dialoguejournal.com/submissions/>. For submissions of visual art, please contact art@dialoguejournal.com. Allow eight to twelve weeks for review of all submissions.

Submissions published in the journal, including letters to the editor, are covered by our publication policy, <https://dialoguejournal.com/submissions/publication-policy/>, under which the author retains the copyright of the work and grants *Dialogue* permission to publish. See www.dialoguejournal.com.

EDITORS EMERITI

Eugene England and G. Wesley Johnson

Robert A. Rees

Mary Lythgoe Bradford

Linda King Newell and L. Jackson Newell

F. Ross Peterson and Mary Kay Peterson

Martha Sonntag Bradley and Allen D. Roberts

Neal Chandler and Rebecca Worthen Chandler

Karen Marguerite Moloney

Levi S. Peterson

CONTENTS

LETTERS

A Postapocalyptic Perspective?	<i>Mark Thomas</i>	v
Bender Responds	<i>Jacob Bender</i>	vii
Brother, Can You Spare a Book?	<i>Michelle Inouye</i>	vii

ARTICLES AND ESSAYS

Abundant Events or Narrative Abundance: Robert Orsi and the Academic Study of Mormonism	<i>Stephen Taysom</i>	1
The Temple and the Sacred: Dutch Temple Experiences	<i>Walter E. A. Van Beek</i>	27

PERSONAL VOICES

My Mother Tongues	<i>Michael Hicks</i>	55
Deaths and (Re)births	<i>Jacob T. Baker</i>	65

POETRY

A Short Poem about Nearly Everything	<i>R. A. Christmas</i>	89
Graphene	<i>Clifton Holt Jolley</i>	90
Hobble Creek Almanac	<i>Justin Evans</i>	92
Inaccuracy	<i>Justin Evans</i>	93
Sixth-Grade Broadway Revue	<i>Jim Richards</i>	94
Janie Goodmansen's Reply	<i>Jim Richards</i>	96
Fern Hill Revisited	<i>Jonathon Penny</i>	97
"Epithalamion" by Gerard Manley Hopkins	<i>Jonathon Penny</i>	98

FICTION

Sandrine	<i>Levi S. Peterson</i>	103
Hank Toy's Devil	<i>Jack Harrell</i>	123

REVIEWS

A Story-Telling Folk

- Tom Mould. *Still, the Small Voice: Narrative, Personal Revelation, and the Mormon Folk Tradition* Blair Dee Hodges 138

Faith and Doubt in the First-Person Singular

- Therese Doucet. *A Lost Argument: A Latter-Day Novel*
- Robert Rees, ed. *Why I Stay: The Challenges of Discipleship for Contemporary Mormons*
- Thomas Riskas. *Deconstructing Mormonism: An Analysis and Assessment of the Mormon Faith* Rosalynde Welch 146

The Cultural Contexts of Mormonism

- Kim Östman. *The Introduction of Mormonism to Finnish Society, 1840–1900* Mark Kilmer 158

To the Edges of Modern Life

- Hugh J. Cannon. *To the Peripheries of Mormondom.* Edited by Reid Neilson Erica Eastley 161

A Big Task for a Small Book

- Paul C. Gutjahr. *The Book of Mormon: A Biography* Michael Austin 165

FROM THE PULPIT

- On “Praying with Your Feet” Geoff Nelson 171

CONTRIBUTORS 181

LETTERS

A Postapocalyptic Perspective?

Jacob Bender's recent poststructural approach to the Book of Mormon (volume 45, no. 3) is a refreshing addition to Book of Mormon interpretation. Its first five pages provide us with a fine discussion of how the text of the Book of Mormon points beyond itself to a participatory religion that cannot be adequately captured in words. It summarizes the essence of Mormonism, not as a religion of the Book or abstract thought, but as a religion of experience to which the text points. But unfortunately, once Bender gets beyond this initial idea, his interpretation loses its way.

Bender seeks to reread the Book of Mormon in light of the current reader; he emphasizes that his interpretation represents something authentic about the "literary moves" and true authentic voice of the narrators within the Book of Mormon. But it seems to me that the second half of Bender's interpretation of the Book of Mormon is a kind of ventriloquism—using the book to speak his theological mind—that has nothing to do with the puppet text. Every generation, like the early Christian Church and current Mormon readers, must find their own meanings. But if those meanings contradict the words, meaning and spirit of the text, they amount to a tyranny of the reader over the text. But I do not believe that the tyranny of the reader, like the customer, is always right. Here are two of the main points in Bender's article erroneously claiming to be derived from the "literary moves" of the Book of Mormon:

1—All Things Fail

Bender argues that meanings in texts constantly shift based on new contexts. In this constant shifting of meaning, the center of any text is constantly shifting. Here Bender quotes Mormon "For all things must fail." Civilizations fail, words fail, texts fail, the center of meaning fails. But then Bender makes an exception—"the great mediation remains, standing alone." For Bender, only charity as a relationship of atonement is "endless" (Mormon 8:17). It is an eloquent poststructural theology. But Bender's lips are moving. It is an arbitrary distinction. Either all things fail in a poststructural interpretive world, or we are not in a poststructural world. Bender can't have it both ways.

The Book of Mormon proclaims many things to be fundamentally eternal, and eternally dualistic alongside the meaning of charity and the atonement. Hell is as eternal as charity in the Book of Mormon (2 Nephi 28:7–9, 22, Alma 3:26, 42:16, Helaman 6:28, 7:26, Mormon 8:38), as are decrees of God (Ether 2:10), as is priesthood (Alma 13:7–9), as is the plan of happiness and punishment (Alma 42:16), as is the universal presence of the miraculous in every age as the Nephites constantly remind us. If Bender wants to create a personal theology that all meaning shifts and fails, except charity, I think that is a wonderful sentiment. But it is his sentiment and quite foreign to the Book of Mormon.

Why does Mormon say that all things must fail except charity (Mormon 7:46)? It is hyperbole, even for

Mormon. Mormon's comment is certainly patterned after 1 Corinthians 13 in which charity is a spiritual gift which never ends, though other spiritual gifts do. But Mormon's notion is much more modest than Bender's universal shifting of meaning. In Bender's understanding of meaning, we are now in the realm of personal theology, not interpretation of texts.

2—The Book of Mormon as Restoration Apocalypse

Bender claims that Mormon has a "postapocalyptic perspective." His primary evidence is the Nephite notion of the inadequacy of words to replace religious experience. But, apparently, Bender is not familiar with the well-established scholarship (Perrin, Wilder, etc.) that maintains that the inadequacy of words is in fact a hallmark of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writing. That is one of the reasons that apocalyptic presents its message in such bizarre, dreamlike, and mythical images—to express the unutterable.

Contrary to Bender, I would characterize the Book of Mormon as a Restoration Apocalypse. Bender claims that the Book of Mormon is not dualist. But the Book of Mormon, like much of traditional apocalyptic, is fundamentally dualist—a cosmic battle between good and evil. 2 Nephi 2 tells us that if we eliminate that dualism or opposition in all things, we destroy the earth and God ceases to be God. Yet Bender denies that fundamental opposition.

Traditional apocalyptic often portrays a narrative vision or dream that is interpreted by an angel to represent in

allegorical form the history from the beginning of the world or from the time of the visionary to the end of the world, the time when the audience and author live. Since prophecy was believed to have ceased, apocalyptic is often but not always pseudonymous, drawing upon the name and authority of some ancient seer. In the end times, evil is in control, but God will send a Messianic figure that will defeat evil. Then begins a new age ruled by God. But the dualism remains. Satan is not destroyed, only bound. So goes the outline of many apocalyptic works. The most famous are Daniel and the book of Revelation. But there are many outside of the canon as well, down into the time of Joseph Smith. The audience is the current reader who stands at the end of time, in the great battle between good and evil.

Mormon is consistent with Book of Mormon apocalyptic perspectives. He presents narratives as warnings for the latter day and explicitly addresses the reader "when this work shall commence" (Mormon 3:17) at the end time, not postapocalyptic in time or outlook. The Book of Mormon as a whole follows apocalyptic literary forms, its theological outlook and tenor, the typical dualism of apocalyptic in the whiteness of fruit of the tree versus dark wilderness and mists of darkness, etc., interpretive angels in Lehi's dream, the typical allegorical interpretation of a vision, Mormon's reading of the Nephite collapse as a type of the readers' apocalypse, and widespread allusions and quotations from biblical apocalyptic—"the whore upon

many waters,” “I looked and behold,” etc. The Book of Mormon represents itself as the latter-day messianic figure before the millennium, along with the gathering and final battle—all this points to the Book of Mormon as thoroughly apocalyptic. To go with Bender and call the Book of Mormon postapocalyptic is the equivalent of asserting that the poetry of Emily Dickinson is actually opera rather than poetry.

Bender may be postapocalyptic. Mormon definitely is not. Again the Book of Mormon is a Restoration Apocalypse.

The temptation is ever present for all of us to look upon the sacred text as a mirror, a mirror on the wall, telling us that our personal theology is the fairest of them all. It is more difficult to read scripture well than any other sort of text. It takes courage to read a scriptural text that contradicts one's cherished values and surprises one's expectations. Misreadings of scriptural texts have a long and illustrious history. Dozens of systems of Gematria (assigning numerical value to a word or phrase and matching verses that have the same numerical value), spiritualizings, typologies, metaphorical meanings, elaborate chiasmic structures encompassing entire books, multiple literal senses, allegories, moral and hidden secret meanings, code, and yes, poststructural approaches to scripture like Bender's all fill the stage of scriptural ventriloquism. If Bender has entered with a wooden text in his arms, who among us has not?

*Mark Thomas
Holladay, UT*

Jacob Bender Responds

I'm flattered that Mr. Mark Thomas felt my essay worth his response. I hope he accepts it as equal flattery that I respond in kind. I would like to address his second objection first, namely, that the Book of Mormon is a “Restoration Apocalypse,” not mere postapocalyptic. I'm actually in complete agreement with him; I wrote that the Book of Mormon's “effect is not one of final dissolution a la Marquez—quite the opposite, in fact.” The Book of Mormon looks forward to the end of the world not as an ending doom but as a joyous rejuvenation. If my essay did not make that distinction explicit, then I apologize for the confusion.

He is also right to point out how “according to well-established scholarship . . . the inadequacy of words is in fact a hallmark of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writing.” The inadequacy of words is also a hallmark of poststructural apocalyptic writing. In fact, a compare/contrast between the two literary traditions—one super-ancient, the other super-modern—sounds like it would make a fascinating study.

I'm more confused by his accusation that I argue “all meanings shift and collapse”—on the contrary, I don't argue that meaning collapses, only the signifiers. There is in fact a God in heaven, hell beneath, an Atonement of Christ, and an eternity beyond comprehension. These are what remain after the signifiers collapse. I also agree with Mr. Thomas's assertion that there is a fundamental dualism outlined in 2 Nephi 2; Satan is also

aware of this dualism, and so, in the words of Brigham Young, he “distracts our minds” with false dualisms, the latter of which the Book of Mormon hastens to deconstruct. I suspect Mr. Thomas and I are ultimately arguing more about semantics than doctrine.

But, I do quibble with him more on his declaration that Moroni 7:46 is “hyperbole.” Mr. Thomas has stated that “Mormon’s notion is much more modest” than mine. On the contrary, I fear that I am too modest for Mormon. This was a man who knew he would lose everyone—everyone—he ever loved, cared for, or knew. Do we fully understand that? He beheld in visions not only the complete destruction of his people, institutions, and civilization, but of ours as well. “Hyperbole” implies that his words exaggerate his subject, but I don’t think any words can exaggerate Mormon’s loss. Like Malachi, he beheld the elements melt with a fervent heat, the mountains made low, the valleys high, and all things made new. When Mormon declares “all things must fail,” there is nothing hyperbolic about that statement—I believe he means us to take him quite literally. Otherwise, we are the ones who ventriloquize over his voice.

Jacob Bender
Salt Lake City, UT

Brother, Can You Spare a Book?

I am writing to make you aware of a project that may be of interest to *Dialogue* readers. Beginning in 2013, the Mormon Studies program at Claremont Graduate University will be hosting a book drive for the International Mormon Studies (IMS) project, which will donate Mormon studies collections to university libraries outside of North America. This will not only enable researchers outside of North America to access the best work in Mormon studies, but will also give them a springboard from which to contribute their own work. Interested parties should email Melissa Inouye at the following address: internationalmormonstudies@gmail.com.

Michelle Inouye
Claremont, CA

Correction

The following paragraph was omitted from the “Contributors” section for *Dialogue*’s fall 2012 issue: “John G. Turner teaches religious studies at George Mason University. He is the author of *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Harvard University Press, 2012).”

Abundant Events or Narrative Abundance: Robert Orsi and the Academic Study of Mormonism

Stephen Taysom

Introduction

This essay is an experiment of sorts. For some time, Mormon Studies has attempted to move beyond the narrow confines of its past, with its focus on institutional histories and biographies of important people (mostly white men), toward a more methodologically nuanced and interpretive multi-disciplinary approach. Part of that growth requires that the data of Mormon Studies be scrutinized through the theoretical approaches coming out of disciplines such as religious studies. This essay does two things. First, it describes Orsi's method and situates it within the context of religious studies methodology. Second, it scrutinizes the historical narratives associated with Joseph Smith's "golden plates" through the lenses provided by Robert Orsi's theory of "abundant events" in order to test the suitability of Orsi's method to the data of Mormon Studies. The source material will be familiar, perhaps even banal, to students of Mormon history. Much of it is drawn from widely available collections of primary sources that have been known and used for many decades. This is intentional, and a very important element of the experiment. It is the only way that we can test how a new theoretical model might allow scholars to view common things in new and uncommon ways.

The utility of Orsi's category of abundant events is mixed but it presents encouraging possibilities. It does, on one hand, have a

certain appeal because it seems to lend a richness of thought to the study of the more difficult problems of the supernatural faced by scholars of religion in general and of Mormonism in particular. On the other hand, as we shall see, there are significant questions that this study raises about Orsi's category. Most significant is how one should understand the role of narrative in the culture-changing power of the abundant events, something that must be addressed if his category is to reach its promise as a tool of significant scholarly utility.

Religious Studies and the Problems of Definition

To be a scholar of religious studies is to find oneself in a fierce debate about the nature of the object of that study. Stated simply, scholars cannot agree on what "religion" is. Is it, as William James believed, the sum total of the feelings, thoughts, and acts that bind a human being to the divine?¹ Or was Paul Tillich right when he described religion as the act of being grasped by "ultimate concern"?² Clifford Geertz suggested that it was a complex cultural symbolic system, while Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge held that religions are "systems of general compensators based on supernatural assumptions."³ Jonathan Z. Smith famously concluded that "religion" is not an organic phenomenon at all, but rather a taxonomic device, "solely the creation of the scholar's study."⁴

Right out of the gate, then, scholars of religion face a complex definitional problem. This problem has two basic components. First, "religion" as a categorical notion emerged out of the European experience in which Roman Catholicism was taken as normative, and early attempts to define the category of religion were conflated with the specific facets of that particular kind of religion. As scholars in the West began to collect more and more data that they thought looked in some way "religious," they found that the definitions that they had developed were insufficiently flexible to accommodate the vast variety of material that they found.⁵ That problem persists and has never been adequately addressed. The result is dynamic and multi-faceted dialogue over what represents the most authentic elements of a religion: is authenticity to be found in what religions share, or in the divergences? Huston Smith and Karen Armstrong would hold that the common ele-

ments are truly authentic, while Stephen Prothero dismisses that approach as soft-headed sentimentalism.⁶ How one answers that question naturally shapes the comparative frame into which particular religions are slipped.

The second part of the difficulty in defining religion, and related closely to the first, is that the objects, beliefs, and practices that most people, especially in the West, consider “religious” often relate in some way to unprovable “supernatural” claims. Indeed, as one historian of the Enlightenment observed, “the basic error Enlightenment ideologues tried to remove from Christian [and, by extension, Western] culture was . . . its long-standing weakness for imagining the presence of spiritual realities in nature.”⁷ When faced with claims that violate the rules of rationality, scholars are faced with a difficult methodological choice: either accept the emic description of events or reject the emic point of view and provide a second-order analysis of the event using tools from a discipline such as anthropology, sociology, history, literary theory or psychology. As one would expect, scholarly opinion on this falls along a continuum. Clustered at either end of the spectrum are relatively small groups of scholars. At one end, there is a school of thought best represented by Wilfrid Cantwell Smith, who believed “that no statement about a religion is valid unless it can be acknowledged by that religion’s believers.”⁸ Smith thus gives absolute primacy to first-order definitions and explanations and severely limits the interpretive role of the scholarly observer.

At the other pole, Russell McCutcheon and a handful of like-minded scholars militate against what they view as the craven subservience to religious authority demonstrated by Smith and others. McCutcheon, in particular, has written extensively of the need for scholars of religion to act as “critics not caretakers” of religious traditions.⁹ McCutcheon states quite emphatically that “to study religion as something fundamentally religious—something studied only in terms of the religious person’s own expectations and criteria—is, therefore, to fail to study its actual causes, these assorted hopes and fears of historically embedded human beings.”¹⁰ Bruce Lincoln expressed this point of view more succinctly when he wrote that “when one permits those whom one studies to define the terms in which they will be understood . . .

one has ceased to function as historian or scholar.”¹¹ For scholars in this group, religious claims receive no special treatment and there is no academically sound reason to view the beliefs of religious practitioners as anything but data to be analyzed. “Religious” data are, therefore, not *sui generis*, but are open to the same criticisms as any other data.

Most scholars of religion find themselves somewhere between the two ends of the continuum, trying constantly, and often in vain, to strike some sort of balance that allows scholarly analysis of “religious” experience while simultaneously avoiding “reductionism” that would render the experience unintelligible to those who experienced it in the first place. All of these factors make for a contentious discipline, to be sure, but they also capacitate a vibrant, healthy, and continuous reevaluation of the theories and methods to be used to study religion. Out of this jungle of contention grows a vast theoretical literature that frequently presents possible new approaches to the academic study of religion. One of the great joys of studying religion is to periodically examine one’s own field of expertise through the lens of a new methodology or category.

Robert Orsi and Abundant Events

Robert Orsi is an influential and distinguished scholar of American Catholic history. For the past few years, in a variety of publications and conference addresses, he has presented and developed his theory of “abundant events.” In the fall of 2011, Orsi participated in a published discussion with distinguished historian of Mormonism Richard L. Bushman, in which they speculated about the usefulness of Orsi’s theory to the study of Mormonism. During that exchange, Orsi called the origins of Mormonism an “extraordinary act of imagination” and argued that events such as the discovery of the gold plates bring scholars to “the limits of [scholars’] inherited explanatory tools and [they] need to find new ones.”¹² Orsi and Bushman are thus optimistic that the theory of abundant events will prove useful to the study of Mormonism.

Orsi’s theory is both a statement of a problem and a proposed solution.¹³ The problem that Orsi presents is a complex one: how do scholars of religion account for experiences that are simulta-

neously irrational and real? Orsi has argued that events with “supernatural” characteristics are often mistreated, reduced, and misrepresented by scholars who have only the linguistic tools of modernity at their disposal.¹⁴ Orsi is not the first scholar to make such an argument. He is among a school of religious studies scholars who want to avoid the problem of “reductionism,” in which interpreters of religion explain supernatural experiences in psychological, anthropological, or sociological terms, and thus “reduce” them to something other than what they really are. Orsi therefore falls toward the Wilfred Cantwell Smith end of the spectrum discussed above. As Orsi phrases it, “One challenge of writing about religion, is to figure out how to include figures of special power as agents in history and actors of consequence in historical persons’ lives and experiences.”¹⁵ It is the word “special” that signifies the real thrust of Orsi’s efforts. And it is this element in Orsi’s argument that raises the hackles of some other religious studies scholars. As the statement from Lincoln that I quoted above makes clear, one of the most trenchant criticisms of any kind of approach that appears to privilege religious experiences is that there is a kind of occult apologetics at work. By creating a special category for religious experience, the criticism goes, one insulates religion itself from criticism. I agree that this has been a problem with phenomenological approaches to the study of religion at least since the time of Rudolf Otto. But what makes Orsi’s category potentially appealing, even to a scholar who leans as far toward the McCutcheon side of the debate as I do, is that Orsi is attempting to create categories that bring religious experience into the “real” world rather than attempting to fence them off. He is not entirely successful in this attempt, but he has advanced the debate farther than anyone else since Mircea Eliade’s field-shifting work produced in the 1950s.

Orsi’s writing on the category of abundant events is scattered across a number of books and articles, so I offer a summary here based on those disparate sources. “One of the first things to say about an abundant event,” Orsi writes, “is that it serves as a focusing lens for the intricacies of relationships in a particular area at a particular time, [and provides] meaning for all the hopes, desires, and fears circulating among a group of people as these were taking

shape at a certain place and at a certain time.”¹⁶ Among other functions, then, abundant events illuminate the contours of culture and are in this way anchored in reality, and act upon that reality the same way that any other event is. Orsi suggests that scholars ought to spend some time trying to figure out how an abundant event, as irrational as it might seem, “finds presence, existence, and power in space and time, how it becomes as real as guns and stones and bread, and then how the real in turn acts as an agent for itself in history.”¹⁷ I take issue with Orsi on this only to the extent that I think he is vague about the relationship between the narratives into which these abundant events are inscribed, and the events *qua* events. I am left wondering which of the two allows us to see the cultural landscape. Or is the narrative part of the event? That issue does not have to be decided or agreed upon, however, in order to make the case that something connected with abundant events sheds light on ordinarily dark and unspoken elements of a culture, which in turn helps scholars understand and map how these options speak to the fears and dreams of that culture. The strength of Orsi’s category is in his argument about the potential of abundant events to reveal otherwise hidden aspects of a culture.

In addition to describing in general terms what abundant events do, Orsi generated a set of criteria that defines more exactly the characteristics of an abundant event.

First, such events present themselves as *sui generis*: people experience them as singular, even if they are recognizable within cultural convention—for instance, even if a culture prepares us for an encounter with witches, when the encounter happens, it is considered out of the ordinary. Second, abundant events are real to those who experience them, who absolutely know them not to be dreams, hallucinations, delusions, or other kinds of sensory error, even though others around them may and often do contest this. Third, they arise and exist among people. They are intersubjective (although this intersubjectivity may include the dead, for instance, or saints). They arise at the intersection of past/present/future (as these really are or as they are dreaded or feared or hoped for). At the moment of such an event we have a new experience of the past while at the same time the horizon of the future is fundamentally altered.¹⁸

Orsi takes as his starting point the problem of understanding religious phenomena that became entrenched during the Enlight-

enment. It was during this era that the idea of “religion” as a discrete category of beliefs and behaviors emerged and was cast in the language of liberal Protestant thought. Thus, according to Orsi, the very language that established “religion” as a category also severely circumscribed the type of experiences that could be included: the kinds of experience that pertained to “domesticated modern civic Protestantism” defined the category.¹⁹ This language is not sufficiently dimensioned to address what Orsi refers to as “abundant events.” Speaking on behalf of “many (not all) scholars of religion,” Orsi laments the limits of “social and psychological” analyses of religion which “fall short of the realness of the phenomena they purport to describe and explain in people’s experience.” The chief problem, as Orsi sees it, is that social-scientific methods “pretend to be exhaustive” and therefore are “empirically insufficient.”²⁰

Because many scholars of religion attempt to eliminate the ontological questions that always clamor for answers when it comes to supernatural claims, Orsi feels that the discipline has missed a very important opportunity to understand how numinous events or claims end up coming to life and animating the thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors not only of the persons who experienced them, but also the lives of those who contend against them. These abundant events, according to Orsi, “are characterized by aspects of the human imagination that cannot be completely accounted for by social and cultural codes, that go beyond authorized limits.”²¹ Likewise, Orsi laments in the strongest language the inability of religious studies scholars “to make one’s own self-conceptions vulnerable to the radically destabilizing possibilities of a genuine encounter with an unfamiliar way of life.”²² Orsi’s interest in the idea of the “abundant event” is driven by his belief that the academic study of religion, by its very nature, distorts its subject and precludes itself from studying religion *qua* religion, something that as a Catholic studying Catholics he finds severely limiting. Orsi argues that modern religious studies engages in a strange game of category bait and switch: scholars claim to study religion but we study everything but religion. We render the religious in the language of psychology, sociology, economic, critical theory, anthropology, political science, cognitive science, and so

forth. This language is not sufficient to address “abundant events.” Even scholars who approach religion from the McCutcheon side of the continuum, according to Orsi, should recognize that these events, ultimately real or not, produce real-world consequences and should therefore command the respect of scholars.

I cannot get over the feeling that Orsi might be using a straw man here. His location of the reality of abundant events in the power they have to motivate real action in the world is diminished by the fact that no one really disputes that point. If Joseph Smith had never claimed to have found and translated golden plates, there would have been no Book of Mormon. Not a single scholar of religion could honestly disagree with that. The disagreement comes when Orsi insists that the actions produced by the claim of an individual to have experienced an abundant event somehow provide evidence that such an event is as real as “stones.” It is at this point that Orsi’s case is the least convincing, because he seems to be engaging in little more than the old phenomenological method of Otto and his acolytes, in which the scholar assumes *a priori* the existence of some supernatural power and then treats descriptions given by believers of supposed interactions with this “numinous” force as manifestations of this power. Orsi further damages his argument by his hostile use of language. Orsi’s use of terms like “authorized limits” is unfortunate. Furthermore, when he suggests that scholars should find a way to embrace “radically destabilizing possibilities” through their reading of primary sources, he sounds to me more like an evangelist than a scholar, offering an implicit call to repentance for those of us who have, thus far, failed to be sufficiently destabilized by the religious narratives of others. Such language suggests dissatisfaction with the academic study of religion that borders on moral opprobrium, and it is provocative enough that it may make critics of potential friends. It may also represent an allusion to the general project of deconstructionism, which may indeed represent a productive way of approaching the issues that Orsi presents. The problem is that, if he does indeed wish to invoke deconstructionist thought, then he ought to be more explicit about how it informs his method.

Apart from his suggestion that more naturalistic scholars of religion are imposing autocratic limits on what may or may not be

appropriate explanatory models, and his possible deployment of a rhetorical straw man, there is a more serious problem with Orsi's proposal of a special category for "abundant events." Simply stated, he appears to conflate the power of the "event" with the power of the narratives about that event. At the very least, he fails to address the relationship between event and narrative. For decades, historians have developed sophisticated theories about the nature and role of narrative in the making of history. The historical event lacks meaning and is not communicable without the creation of the narrative. As historical sociologist Larry Griffin phrased it, "narratives are made up of the raw materials of sequences of social action but are, from beginning to end, defined and orchestrated by the narrator to include a particular series of actions in a particular temporal order for a particular purpose."²³

It is this created quality that poses a problem for Orsi. Abundant events, as Orsi defines and imagines them, seem to exist and act independent of mundane historical agents—such as human beings. In most of the cases that Orsi discusses in his work, and certainly in the case of the supernatural events described in Mormonism, very few individuals claimed to have experienced the supernatural event in any unmediated way. And even for those who did have such experiences, they had to communicate them to others in some way, or there is nothing in the experience but rank solipsism. Because these events have made their way into the historical record, we know that they made it out of the individual's mind and into the mind of someone else. The vast majority of individuals who come to believe the event is genuine come to that position because of the narratives that the original event generated. In other words, none of these abundant events that Orsi describes, either in particular or as hypotheticals, can exert influence on the real world without being inscribed within narratives; and narratives as such do not seem to fit Orsi's description of abundant events.

A careful reading of Orsi's work on "abundant event" theory suggests that Orsi is possibly attempting to reconfigure, along the lines of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's work, what agency means and the degree to which non-human objects (Cohen chooses stones, for example) may in fact be agents whose actions occur on a plane

that is difficult for humans to comprehend.²⁴ The “abundant events” would then include the narrative that conveys them and so makes them historical actors. If that is the case, and I am by no means certain that it is, then Orsi has solved one problem while creating another one. Jones and scholars engaged in projects similar to his are concerned with natural inanimate objects as historical agents, not supernatural events. Whatever the solution to that problem may be, it is certain that Orsi’s ongoing project to define and understand “abundant events” would benefit from explicit engagement with Jones and scholars working in this general vein.

I can conclude that Orsi’s theory of abundant events is useful to the study of religion in general, and Mormonism in particular, only to the extent that it recognizes, accepts, or explains, in an explicit and clear manner, the role of narrative in the process of making the events “real.” His argument that abundant events, because of their unusual nature, tend to reveal things about a cultural moment that otherwise would remain hidden, would be greatly strengthened, if he could flesh out what I see as the unstated premise that it is the narratives that are created that are the agents of cultural revelation, rather than the events themselves. Linking them explicitly could open up wide vistas of scholarly conversation not only within religious studies but among religious studies, literary theory, history, philosophy, folklore, and anthropology.

Abundant Events and Mormonism

The first question we have to answer before we can proceed is whether or not the gold plates—their discovery, possession, translation, disappearance, etc.—constitute an “abundant event” according to the criteria Orsi sets forth. Are the gold plates “*sui generis*”? Are they extra-categorical? It seems clear that Joseph Smith’s experience with the plates was recognized as out of the ordinary by both believers and unbelievers. People knew about ancient writing on metal plates and people knew about angels. But nobody knew about ancient angels delivering metal plates. Critics of Smith never argued that the experience was banal or derivative, except inasmuch as they attempted to tie the discovery of the plates to money digging culture (more on that later), and Smith and his supporters never attempted to lend credibility to

their claims by arguing that angels delivered plates to people all the time except inasmuch as they nested the recovery of the plates in narratives of other miraculous—and equally out of the ordinary—events in Jewish and Christian history. It is arguable that the plates, and the narratives that they spawned, have few parallels in American religious history.

What about Orsi's next criterion? Are the plates real to those who experience them? Here, Orsi is trying to exclude those events that are frankly fraudulent and known to be such by the individual claiming to have witnessed them. This is difficult to prove in all cases, and the case of the plates is no exception. Historian Dan Vogel believes that Smith may have fabricated plates out of tin.²⁵ If this is true, then Smith was obviously not convinced of the reality of the event and the plates would not be an abundant event *for him*. But, even if the plates never existed and Smith was making up the entire story, the stories themselves are, without doubt, creating events perceived to be real in the minds of many of those who hear or read them. In that case, the abundant event is located not in the experience of Smith with the plates, but in the story of the plates, or the hoax perpetrated on the witnesses if one follows Vogel's reading of the sources—something they apparently believed to be real. In any case, it is undeniable that, for some individuals, the plates were as real as anything else they experienced. This presents a problem for Orsi's category because, again, the power comes not from the event but from the stories told about the event, stories that do not even require the original event to have occurred at all.

This discussion leads us to another of Orsi's criteria for abundant events: "they arise and exist among people. They are intersubjective." Orsi's language is a bit obscure here, but he is arguing that abundant events have real world results. They motivate behavior and create community. They change the world through actions of people who are motivated by them. An earlier version of this essay was delivered at a seminar on the Brigham Young University campus in August 2011. The presence of persons at that conference was evidence enough that the plates fit this criterion. Every person present woke up, traveled to the campus, and sat listening to the papers because of the gold plates—whether they be-

lieved in them or not. And, of course, disbelief in the plates has never kept them from motivating people to action. For example, a man who lived near the Hill Cumorah remembered that soon after Smith claimed to have found the plates in the hill, “there was great excitement through the whole country” that led to expeditions to the hill.²⁶ Consider the case of Lorenzo Saunders, a disbelieving neighbor of the Smiths’. On either the twenty-third or thirtieth of September 1827, Saunders found himself on the Hill Cumorah with “five or six others and we hunted the hill by course and could not find no place where the ground had been broke. There was a large hole where the money diggers had dug a year or two before, but no fresh dirt. There never was such a hole; there never was any plates taken out of that hill . . . It is a lie.”²⁷ How does one account for Saunders’s presence on that hill? If we adhere to the theory of abundant events, then we must concede that Saunders is on the hill because the abundant event itself intruded into the world and re-ordered reality to lead him there. But that is not the only possible reason. The event need not be “abundant” or even real. Even if the plates were found, it was the story about the plates that led Saunders to the hill and motivated his exploration, not the event itself. Saunders’s expedition is not evidence of “abundance,” it is evidence of the power of story-telling.

Finally, Orsi argues that abundant events “arise at the intersection of past/present/future (as these really are or as they are dreaded or feared or hoped for).” At the moment of such an event we have a new experience of the past while at the same time the horizon of the future is fundamentally altered. “Abundant events are saturated by memory, desire, need, fear, terror, hope or denial, or some inchoate combination of these.”²⁸ This is the most important of all of Orsi’s criteria and the one which lends itself best to the case of the gold plates. As such, it merits a fuller exploration than the other criteria. In order to fully examine the proposition that the gold plates represent an abundant event, we have to look closely at the way narrative accounts about the plates, as they are put forth by both supporters of Smith and his detractors, reveal the worldviews of their authors.

It may be helpful at this point to explore possible nuances of Orsi’s thought by introducing ideas that are consonant with his the-

orizing, but which broaden its scope. By creating another category, and briefly looking at the work of two other theorists, it is possible to demonstrate that Orsi's category of abundant events is not as novel, or as helpful, as it might appear to be. It may be productive to imagine and describe abundant events as "Frontier Events." The "plates" emerge in a world of frontiers. We often speak of Joseph Smith as having lived on the "frontier." This is taken to mean a geographical frontier, with all of the rough and tumble that such a life brings with it. There is no question that Joseph did live on such a frontier. But, he also lived on other frontiers. A frontier might be understood as a liminal space where the range of what philosopher William James called "live options" is radically expanded.²⁹ James argued that one's belief in the reality (the real-ness) of anything depended upon how "alive" the option was to the individual thinker. In order to be "live" an idea or an option for behavior must appeal, at least to some minute degree, to what James calls a "tendency to act." An option is "live" not because of any inherent quality of the option itself, but rather it comes to life and dies because of the particular cultural conditions in which it is embedded. Nobody worships Osiris anymore, but Osiris has not changed. That is a dead option because the world changed around Osiris. The stories about Osiris and his daily trip around the solar circuit motivated real behavior among the ancient Egyptians. But it no longer does so. This suggests to me that scholars might find it useful to explore the question of how abundant events die. By grappling with the implications of the loss that occurs when something that Orsi identifies as an abundant event no longer motivates behavior in the real world, scholars might be able to extend the scope and subtlety of Orsi's theory.

Returning to the idea of "live options," philosopher Bruno Latour has described ideas or objects that perform this function as "actants." Actants, like abundant events, are contested because they carry with them the possibility of irrevocable cultural shifts. Latour writes that

as a result of the actants' work, certain things do not return to their original state. A shape is set, like a crease. It can be called a trap, a ratchet, an irreversibility, a Maxwell's demon, a reification. The exact word does not matter so long as it designates an asymmetry.

Then you cannot act as you wish. There are winners and losers, there are directions, and some are made stronger than others.³⁰

So if the plates represent an abundant event and a new live option, then it is crucial to understand the frontier world into which they “intruded.” It was a world of political frontiers. When Smith was born there had only been five presidential elections and three presidents. He lived in a new nation with a new constitution that carried within it the promise of a radical re-visioning of the relationship between government and the governed. The plates emerged in a world of economic frontiers. The failure of two national banks in Smith’s lifetime, accompanied by a high level of national debt stemming from the War of 1812, combined with privately issued back currency to produce an unstable world of inflation and speculation.³¹ Perhaps most significantly, the plates emerged in a world of religious frontiers—the Second Great Awakening. But it was much more than that. It was a constellation of religious revolutions driven by theological innovation and sectarian invention that forever shifted not only the denominational landscape, but the entire cultural shape of religion in America. It multiplied, exponentially, the number of “live” options available to Americans in the arena of religious choice.³² Mormonism, of course, emerged as part of this frontier. Even before the church was founded, however, the stories about Joseph Smith and his “golden bible” electrified the cultural frontiers of America. Abundant events are frontier events inasmuch as they suggest new live options for a culture. In other words, abundant events do not simply illuminate culture—they change it. Here I think Orsi’s category is very useful. Events that challenge, or even insult, the cultural sensibilities of a particular place and time tend to elicit responses from cultural actors that reveal all sorts of cultural structures. Such events do not have to be supernatural, of course, but supernatural claims seem to perform this function with particular efficiency. Certainly this is the case with the gold plates.

Stories about the plates are dropped into a nineteenth-century American cultural matrix that was already destabilized and frontier-like in almost every way imaginable. As we would expect given what we know from Orsi, Latour, James, and others, the historical record suggests that worlds of discourse immediately catalyzed

around the “plates,” all of which claim that the “plates” signified some fundamental truth about the state of reality on local, national, and cosmic levels. “Plates”—not just the object but the stories about the object—violate and reveal structures of expectation even in a world in which the number of live options has dramatically increased. The worlds of discourse that emerge are founded on shared assumptions about how reality is supposed to work, and the “plates” could not easily fit in to any of them. This is what gives them their power as an idea, it is what makes them abundant. To really grasp the scope of this abundance—the degree to which the plates reveal worldviews and shape culture, we must look closely at the narratives generated by the plates. These narratives that center on the plates tell us much more about the worldview of the authors than those authors would have guessed. Unsurprisingly, most, but not all, narratives generated by the plates come in the form of either pro- or anti-Mormon propaganda. Each body of narratives contains an implicit construction of the self and an explicit construction of the other.

First, let’s consider the pro-Mormon narratives. This narrative world takes as its mission solving the problem of chaos through the bundle of implications signified by the plates, including divine authority, chosenness, and knowing the will of God. This community believed that it was opposed by a world characterized by “evil disposed and designing persons” from a variety of backgrounds and dominated by sinister cultural conditions. It was a world struggling in “darkness and confusion.” Religious chaos and contention stemmed from the “sophistry” and “reason” employed by the newly dominant forms of American evangelical Christianity. In this world, the “seemingly good feelings of both priests and converts were more pretended than real.”³³ In other words, this was a world of chaos and pretense. This was a world in which the disparate elements were bound together through hate, which was then reified in the form of persecution. Smith wrote that, despite all of the diversity of religious opinion and the contention that such diversity engendered, “all [of the parties] united to persecute *me*.”³⁴ Smith’s claim to possess the plates rendered him vulnerable to physical and even psychic attack in the form of competing scryers who vandalized the Smith property in an at-

tempt to locate the plates.³⁵ This was a dangerous world, and the plates seemed to make it more dangerous—at least temporarily. It was a world in which the devil seemed to hold great sway. The devil, too, targeted Smith and his followers and motivated those who opposed him. Unsurprisingly, Smith's accounts of Satanic attacks and attempts to separate him from the plates illuminate the then-recent development of a muscular diabolology among evangelical Protestants.³⁶

What is interesting about this discourse community, however, is that it rejected all of the extant modes of thought and action that might preclude a solution to the chaos. Embedded in the invention of a new religious tradition founded on the idea of supernatural intrusions into banal reality was an effort to stabilize rather than revolutionize the world. Joseph Smith's plates stood for these people as a concrete symbol of authority, of the voice of God who proclaimed a narrow road to heaven. This discourse community was looking to shut down live options, rather than to encourage them. Crucial to this project was the need to establish the plates as an instantiation of all the ideas and concepts that would save the world from pretense and chaos. It involved a recasting of the past as well as the future, especially the American past and future. In an 1835 account of the early history of the Church, Joseph Smith said that Moroni told him the "Indians were the literal descendants of Abraham." Orson Hyde made a similar statement in 1842, but his words reveal how the plates had implications for America's future as well as its past: Moroni told Smith that

the American Indians were remnants of the House of Israel and they were an enlightened people when they left Jerusalem to emigrate to America, possessing the knowledge of the true God and enjoying his blessing and special favor. In the course of time, this nation fell into ungodliness and the greater part of them were exterminated; but . . . their records were deposited for protection into the earth's bowels, in order to preserve them from the hands of the godless who sought to destroy them. . . . He was told that these records contained many sacred revelations pertaining . . . to the events of the last days.³⁷

Many of the people who joined Joseph's community felt that religious "authority" had been lost and they looked for its return. Although most Latter-day Saints are aware of these motifs, it is

worth noting that they are based on a cultural assumption: namely that there is one right way of getting to heaven and anyone offering other options is effectively leading people to hell. This is not a community that is going to favor a plenitude of live options. It is not a community that is going to wish to perpetuate the frontier that gave birth to it. Consider the testimony of Martin Harris. Harris recalled that, in 1818, he “was inspired of the Lord & tought of the spirit that I should not join any church although I was anxiously sought for by meny of the sectarians. I was taught I could not walk together unless agreed.” Harris goes on to tell how he demanded both uniformity and rationality from the “sectarians” in their theological enterprise: if a principle was not in the Bible, then Harris rejected it. He notes especially that he found the doctrine of a disembodied, Trinitarian god repulsive and non-Biblical. Harris finally concluded that “there was no authority for the Spirit told me that I might just as well plunge myself into the Water as to have any one of the sects baptize me.”³⁸ Harris’s views are largely representative of many early converts to Mormonism. This was a world that had at its heart a paradox: chaos in the form of religious competition was a major threat that could only be neutralized by authority which, in turn, could only emerge in a world with an unusually high number of live options. But, as the Harris testimony makes clear, this was also a world in which coherence was important and “proof” mattered. Any claim to absolute authority in such an environment would naturally have to be solidly anchored to a reality that could be tested, even if the tests were rudimentary. It is no surprise, then, that for Harris and hundreds like him, it is the story of the plates that becomes the most persuasive live option. The plates become, in effect, the live option to end all live options for those who inhabit the discourse community established by Smith.

We need to turn now to a consideration of the other community of discourse, also focused on the plates, but which saw them as a dangerous hoax. Just as with documents that function as pro-Mormon propaganda, when viewed at the right angle, these texts provide a window into the worldview of their creators. This was a community that claimed to value order, thrift, hard work, and honesty, and associated these traits with a middle-class sensi-

bility. They generally adhered to evangelical Christian ideas, which were assumed to be rational, non-ritualized, private, and based on the Bible. Other religious expressions were marginalized through the use of a discourse of “superstition” and irrationality. They understood the progress of America to be linked with progress of Protestant Christianity to create and maintain cultural and religious order. They feared disorder, “superstition,” and “infidelity,” not only in religion but also in terms of economics and politics. They prized “authenticity” and despised “pretension.” The documents produced by this community in response to the stories of the plates portray Joseph Smith and his followers as living inversions of their cultural values. Symbolized by Smith, Mormons were viewed as ignorant, “superstitious,” lazy, and disordered. They kept their land in a “slovenly, half-way, profitless manner”³⁹ and spent time “idly lounging” around stores in the village.⁴⁰ They were, in sum, an “Illiterate, whiskey-drinking, shiftless, irreligious race of people.”⁴¹ Furthermore, the Mormons were thought to be motivated by fear and greed and an effort to rise to a “higher sphere in the scale of human existence”⁴² to become, in other words, counterfeit human beings. Joseph Smith “evidenced the rapid development of a thinking, plodding, evil-brewing mental composition—largely given to inventions of low cunning, schemes of mischief and deception, and false and mysterious *pretensions*.”⁴³ Mormons were religiously perverse and spiritually shallow. Pomeroy Tucker argued that Smith quit attending Methodist classes because “his assumed convictions were insufficiently grounded or abiding to carry him along to the saving point of conversion.”⁴⁴

Mormonism also threatened to drag civilization back to a dark age that the new American epoch was supposed to have eradicated forever. A famous letter to the *Palmyra Reflector* from an anonymous correspondent noted: “I observe by the public prints that this most clumsy of all impositions, known among us as Jo Smith’s ‘Gold Bible,’ is beginning to excite curiosity from the novelty of its appearance.” This was a “singular business because it was hardly to be expected, that a mummerly like the one in question, should have been gotten up at so late a period, and among a people, professing to be enlightened.” The author then

argues that the entire episode can be explained by the “money digging mania . . . which eventuated in the discovery of Jo Smith’s ‘Golden Treasure.’”⁴⁵ Another article in the *Palmyra Reflector* attempted to link Smith with other “impostors” from the past, especially those from what was believed to be the dangerous and foreign world of the East. “Jo Smith . . . can bear no comparison to the author of the Koran, and it is only in their ignorance and impudence that a parallel can be found.”⁴⁶

In this discursive world, Joseph Smith, and by implication the entire Mormon enterprise, was viewed as a fraud. The language of pretension and imposture courses through the anti-Mormon documents of the period in an almost obsessive pattern. Consider the following sample of descriptions that employ the motifs of fraud and fakery. Joseph Smith’s delusions “persevered in and improved upon from time to time, culminated in 1827 by the great imposture of the pretended finding of ‘ancient metallic plates resembling gold,’ afterward translated into the ‘Golden Bible’ or Book of Mormon.”⁴⁷ Notice the juxtaposition in this account of perseverance, a known and celebrated virtue, with pretense and fraud, deeply disdained vices. That Joseph is not only a fraud, but one who will stain the good name of perseverance, seems to intensify the critique. In another account, we learn that Joseph Smith, Sr. “would go to Turkey Shoots and get drunk; [he would] pretend to enchant their guns so that they could not kill the Turkey.”⁴⁸ In this case, too, we have a mixed act. Genuine enchantment was a real concern for some in the early Republic, and fraudulent enchantment was no less a threat, but for a different reason. Smith senior appeared to lack respect for the power of enchantment and violated the ethics of authenticity through his pretense. But the Smiths did not only contaminate the virtues of hard work and the fear of enchantment through their fakery. They also contaminated the innocence of beautiful womanhood. “Joseph’s wife [Emma] was a pretty woman; as pretty as I ever saw. When she came to the Smiths she was disappointed and used to come to our house and sit down and cry. She said she was deceived and got into a hard place.”⁴⁹

Imposture, fakery, and fraud, symbolized by the gold plates, were all tied to the contamination and defilement of virtue in a

wide variety of forms. The tone of these documents is uniformly serious, even occasionally grave. There is little mockery of Joseph Smith as a benign idiot or an obvious fakir. Rather, the authors responding to Smith seem to see him as dangerous and threatening because of his willingness to deceive. Consider the following few examples. “It is well known that Jo Smith never *pretended* to have any communion with angels, until a long period after the *pretended* finding of his book, and that the juggling of himself or father, went no further than the *pretended* faculty of seeing wonders in a ‘peep stone,’ and the occasional interview with the spirit, *supposed* to have the custody of hidden treasures; and it is equally well known, that a vagabond fortune-teller by the name of Walters . . . was the constant companion and bosom friend of these money digging *impostors*.”⁵⁰ Six “leading citizens of Canandaigua, New York” (Nathaniel W. Howell, Walter Hubbell, Ansel D. Eddy, Henry Chapin, Jared Willson, and Lewis Jenkins), wrote to Reverend Ancil Beach (a young Methodist minister in Indiana) in January 1832 that: “Joseph Smith has lived in and about Manchester for several years an idle and worthless fellow; previous to the Mormon project he had been engaged for some time in company with several others of the same character [Smith fails at money digging]—Joseph then *pretended* to have found a box, in digging in the woods, containing some gold plates with characters upon them which none but himself could decypher.”⁵¹ Jesse Townsend wrote to Phineas Stiles on December 24, 1833, claiming that

To avoid the sneers of those who had been deceived by Smith [in the money digging failures], he pretended that he had found, when digging alone, a wonderful curiosity, which he kept closely secreted. After telling different stories about it, and applying to it different names, he at length called it the golden plates of the Book of Mormon. As he was questioned on the subject from time to time, his story assumed a more uniform statement, the term finally given to the marvellous treasure being the ‘Golden Bible.’ In the meantime, Joseph visited a visionary fanatic by the name of Martin Harris, and told him that he had received some gold plates of ancient records from the Lord, with a ‘revelation’ to call on him for fifty dollars to enable him to go to Pennsylvania and translate the contents of the plates.

Later in the letter, Townsend writes that Cowdery transcribed the Book of Mormon “as a pretended translation of the golden plates

which he [Smith] affirmed he had been directed by the Spirit of the Lord to dig from the earth.”⁵²

In these narratives, written in response to the story of the gold plates, the themes of fraud and fakery abound, indicating a deep-seated fear shared by Mormons and non-Mormons alike. For each group, the plates represented the focal point of the hopes and fears, the cause of problems and the solution to problems. We have, in the plates, a phenomenon that acts on the world in precisely the ways that Orsi says an abundant event should act. The difficulty is trying to tell where the power of the action is located: in the plates themselves, or in the narratives about the plates.

Conclusion

Orsi implies that abundant events occur at the point where language breaks down and they become difficult to describe. But in the case of the gold plates, we have an abundant event that is described endlessly and in stunning detail by both believers and non-believers. The plates elicit voluminous cultural narratives that serve to expose the cultural assumptions shared by early Mormons and early anti-Mormons—assumptions that include the fear of a culture overwhelmed by its own fecundity and constantly in danger of being duped by the peculiarly potent fakes that accompany frontier life. The plates, to revisit a quote from Latour, “crease” reality so profoundly that it never assumes its old shape. And this is Orsi’s point about abundant events—scholars, in what is sometimes an ironic attempt to reify them, to make them intelligible, or more real, marginalize them or impose upon them an unnatural ideological structure or order and in so doing miss the point entirely.

The gold plates are real precisely because they spill out of the narrative intended for them and move through history in unpredictable ways. I disagree with Orsi’s implicit insistence that abundant events are real in some transcendent and ultimate sense. It is true that they produce unintended consequences; they provoke reactions that reveal the keys to understanding culture. But, again, we return to the problem of narrative. As we have seen from this brief sampling of documents, the plates intruded into American culture only through the vehicle of narrativity, and it

might be the obviously man-made narrativity that gives them such power. The most influential theorist of historical narrative, Hayden White, wrote that

In historical discourse, the narrative serves to transform a list of historical events that would otherwise be only a chronicle into a story. In order to effect this transformation, the events, agents, and agencies represented in the chronicle must be encoded as 'story-elements,' that is to say, characterized as the kinds of events, agents, and agencies that can be apprehended as elements of specific "story-types." On this level of encodation, the historical discourse directs the reader's attention to a secondary referent, different in kind from the events that make up the primary referent, namely, the "plot-structures" of the various story-types cultivated in a given culture.⁵³

If White is correct, then scholars of religion must make a great deal more effort to locate any potential abundant event within its own narrative context. Orsi provides scholars with an inadequate explanation for the role of narrative, and this is deeply problematic because it is the narrative of the events, rather than the events themselves, that motivates action. Orsi seems to take this as an incidental point, as a given. As a result, he never addresses the fact that the events that he describes are only abundant through the work of narrative, nor does he acknowledge that the narratives can exist independent of the reality of the event. It is true that Orsi tries to avoid this problem by asserting that only events believed to be real can qualify as abundant events, but in solving that problem he introduces another, namely the notion that mythology cannot behave within cultures in the same way that abundant events do. That is demonstrably false. For Orsi's work to be more than the statement of a problem, he must grapple with the implications and meaning of the link between event and narrative. Does the event make the narrative? Does the narrative make the event? Can narrative be considered an extension of the abundant event? If so, how? If there is a way for scholars to solve this problem of narrative and event, and I have suggested in this essay that there may be, then Orsi's category of abundant events may bear fruit. There is no doubt that the notion of abundant events is and will continue to be particularly attractive for those scholars and readers who, for whatever reason, feel that the academic study of

religion does violence to the objects that come under its scrutiny. I am optimistic that further scholarly attention to Orsi's "abundant events" idea, scholarship that applies his theory to an ever-widening group of historical data sets, may refine his theory into one of the most important to emerge in the field of religious studies in decades.

Notes

1. James details his definition of religion in his classic work *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Originally published in 1902, the complete work is now available in convenient online editions, such as the following: <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/621/pg621.html>.

2. Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), 1.

3. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 90; Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 39.

4. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), xi.

5. For a detailed discussion of this early period in the study of religion, see Walter H. Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

6. Huston Smith, *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1991); Stephen Prothero, *God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010).

7. Wouter J. Hanegraff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 163.

8. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Comparative Religion—Wither and Why," in *The History of Religions: Essays on Methodology*, edited by Mircea Eliade and Joseph Kitagawa (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 42.

9. See Russell T. McCutcheon, *Critics Not Caretakers: Redescribing the Public Study of Religion* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001).

10. Russell T. McCutcheon, ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in The Study of Religion: A Reader* (London: Cassell, 1999), 67.

11. Bruce Lincoln, "Theses on Method," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, Volume 8 (1996): 225.

12. "Finding the Presence in Mormon History: An Interview with Susanna Morrill, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Robert Orsi," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 44, no. 3 (Fall 2011), 178.

13. I am indebted to my colleague Matthew Bowman for the insight that Orsi's theory of "abundant events" is as much a statement of a problem as it is a theory for interpreting data.

14. It is worth noting that the concept of the "supernatural" is itself an invention of the modern West. See Dale Martin, *Inventing Superstition: From Hippocrates to the Christians* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 13.

15. Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 2.

16. Robert A. Orsi, "Abundant History: Marian Apparitions as Alternative Modernity," *Historically Speaking: The Bulletin of the Historical Society* September/October 2008, 14–15.

17. Robert Orsi, "2+2 = 5, Can We Begin to Think about Unexplained Religious Experiences in Ways That Acknowledge Their Existence?" *The American Scholar*, Spring 2007, available online at <http://www.theamericanscholar.org/when-2-2-5/>.

18. Ibid.

19. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 186.

20. Robert A. Orsi, "The Problem of the Holy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, edited by Robert A. Orsi (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 84.

21. Orsi, "2+2 = 5."

22. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 198.

23. Larry J. Griffin, "Narrative, Event-Structure Analysis and Causal Interpretation in Historical Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology* 98: 5 (March 1993): 1097.

24. See, for example, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Time Out of Memory," in *The Post-Historical Middle Ages*, edited by Elizabeth Scala and Sylvia Federico (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 37–62. I am indebted to one of the anonymous referees of this article for bringing this source to my attention.

25. Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake: Signature Books, 2004), 98.

26. Edward Stevenson, *Reminiscences of the Prophet Joseph* (Salt Lake City: Edward Stevenson, 1893), reproduced in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents* (hereafter *EMD*) 3:387.

27. Lorenzo Saunders to T. H. Gregg, January 28, 1885, reproduced in Charles Augustus Shook, *The True Origin of the Book of Mormon* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing, 1914), 135.

28. Orsi, "2+2=5."

29. James discusses the subject of live options throughout his pam-

phlet, "The Will to Believe" which was originally published in 1896, and which is now available online: <http://educ.jmu.edu/~omearawm/ph101willtobelieve.html>.

30. Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 160.

31. For background on the political and economic culture of the antebellum period, see Daniel Walker Howe, *What God Hath Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). For a discussion of how these events impacted Joseph Smith and his family, see Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005).

32. Among the best treatments of the religious developments of this period are Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990) and Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

33. "Joseph Smith History, 1838–1856, A–1," <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-1838%E2%80%931856-volume-a-1>.

34. *Ibid.*, 4. Emphasis added.

35. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 61.

36. On the emerging evangelical diabolology, see W. Scott Poole, *Satan in America: The Devil We Know* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 33–64, *passim*.

37. "Orson Hyde Account, 1842"; reproduced in Vogel, *EMD* 1:164.

38. "Martin Harris Testimony, 1870,"; reproduced in Vogel, *EMD* 2:332.

39. Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1867), 13.

40. Tucker, *Origin*, 14.

41. *Ibid.*, 16.

42. *Ibid.*, 29.

43. *Ibid.*, 16.

44. *Ibid.*, 18.

45. Letter to the Editor, *Palmyra Reflector*, January 6, 1831; reproduced in Vogel, *EMD* 2:239–240.

46. Abner Cole, "Gold Bible," No. 2, *Palmyra Reflector*, January 18, 1831; reproduced in Vogel, *EMD* 2:241.

47. Tucker, *Origin*, 289.

48. Lorenzo Saunders Interview, reproduced in Vogel, *EMD* 2:127.

49. *Ibid.*, reproduced in Vogel, *EMD* 2:132.

50. *Palmyra Reflector*, January 6, 1831; reproduced in Vogel, *EMD* 2:256.

51. "Nathaniel W. Howe and Others to Ancil Beach," reproduced in Vogel, *EMD* 3:15.

52. Jessee Townsend to Phineas Stiles, December 24, 1833; reproduced in Vogel, *EMD* 3:22.

53. Hayden V. White, "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," *History and Theory* 23:1 (February 1984): 20.

The Temple and the Sacred: Dutch Temple Experiences

Walter E. A. Van Beek

Introduction

In one of the most beautiful songs ever written on the Low Countries, the Belgian *chansonnier* Jacques Brel sang about his flat motherland: “Where men are dwarfs under the heaven, with cathedrals as their only mountains.”¹ Indeed, the classical landmarks of the cities on the old continent are the churches and cathedrals, whose spires rise above the houses, dominate the cityscape, and fill the towns with the sound of their bells, adding a Christian “soundscape” to their visual dominance. European Mormons sometimes feel that in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints they have been dealt a short hand in architecture, as in this sense, Mormonism does not have churches. Instead it has two other types of sacred buildings. Using the LDS Church as a central example, the religious scholar Harold Turner² distinguished between the *domus dei* and the *domus ecclesiae*. The latter is the building where the congregation meets; the former is the abode of the divine. The Roman Catholic cathedrals—the “mountains” of the Netherlands—combine features of both; in the LDS church the *domus ecclesiae*, the meeting house, is quite different from the *domus dei*, the temple. The one is functional but does not quicken the architectural spirit, being in fact standardized, but the second, the much rarer temple, exudes intricate design and architectural pride.

Dutch Mormons now have a *domus dei* in their midst.³ Living in their secularized country, far from the center of Mormon gravity, what does a temple—their temple!—mean for the Dutch members? In this article I want to analyze the Dutch temple experience

on three levels. First, the history of the temple project will be shown from the Dutch perspective, with a discussion of some of the observable effects on the Dutch saints, one of them being a large drop in temple attendance. Second, I will explore the connection of hierarchy and the sacred, exemplified in the absolute control over the temple from the church centre, and in the hierarchy as sacred itself. Third, I will consider the routinization of the sacred, as exemplified by having a local temple, and I will try to characterize the difference between a temple in Deseret and one in the international church. Here I find echoes of the First and Second temples in Jerusalem, which tie our understanding of what constitutes the sacred in Mormonism into the wider academic debate on the sacred.

Ever since Rudolph Otto and Mircea Eliade, the notion of the sacred (in Mormonism the term “holy” is used, which I treat as a synonym) is an old fascination of comparative religion,⁴ but in the last decennia the field has increasingly acknowledged the importance of the religious *space*. A major debate arose within ritual theory between Jonathan Z. Smith⁵ and Ronald Grimes⁶ on the primacy of place versus the dominance of ritual. Smith holds that “sacrality is, above all, a category of *emplacement*”;⁷ Grimes stresses the creative aspect of *ritual* transforming the mundane into the sacred;⁸ after all, rituals have to be done somewhere, a spot which then becomes a special place.⁹ Present thinking stresses that the attribution of sacredness both to a ritual and a place is so universal that a more productive inquiry into the sacred requires us to balance the properties of the place with the characteristics of the ritual.¹⁰ In this article I will follow this approach, hopefully providing a productive insight into Mormon temple sacrality, with its very own balance between ritual and place, between the “ordinances”¹¹ and the “House of the Lord.” For Mormons, temple “holiness” is tied into the rituals performed inside, but neither can exist in isolation, as ordinances are not possible outside the temple, nor would a temple be holy without the rituals.¹² Thus, speaking about the temple experience for Dutch Mormons requires us to consider their definition of the sacred—both the authority embodied in the temple rituals and the place of this new holy Mormon building in the Dutch denominational landscape.

A short methodological note is apt here, as the data presented

stem from various sources. My own positions in the Church¹³ allowed me access to many of the experiences of and conversations on the temple mentioned below, supplemented by specific interviews with civic and temple officials¹⁴ and written documents, including the documented history of the Dutch temple.¹⁵

A Lowlands Temple

Officially, the name of the Dutch Mormon temple is *The Hague Temple*, but no Dutch Saint ever calls it that, as for them it is the “temple in Zoetermeer.” Zoetermeer is a sizeable municipality of its own, and as all cities are close to each other, the Dutch are quite precise in their geographical indications. Likewise they tend to speak about the temple in Friedrichsdorf and in Zollikofen; the other terms (Frankfurt, Bern) are seen as Americanisms. But in the Dutch case there is an additional reason for renaming the temple after “Zoetermeer,” as the name literally means “Sweet Lake,” so this is the temple of “Sweet Lake City.” In fact this translation had been already used by the former mayor of Zoetermeer when he visited Salt Lake City,¹⁶ and it was picked up by newspapers in their reports on the temple as well. The gentle quip stuck. The present mayor of Zoetermeer, Jan Waaijer, commented in an interview that whatever its official name, “For us it is a part of Zoetermeer.”¹⁷ The mayor appears to appreciate having a Mormon temple in his city: “As an architectonic object it is quite complete. It exudes a certain discipline: Everything under control, a sense of order which is not foreign to the group as such. The slightly cubist building is constructed with superior materials, which heightens the image of a church that is well organized. For us as Zoetermeer city, this is one of the sights to be seen, an object to be proud of.” The mayor then remarked that he would expect the temple presidency, as those responsible for one of the major institutions in Zoetermeer, to be active in Zoetermeer civic life: “At the very least they could come to the New Year’s reception at the City Hall.” None of the men that manage the temple have ever attended this official reception, a question I will address later.¹⁸

So, for the Dutch saints this is the temple in Zoetermeer, but for them it is not the location that counts but the fact that it is a *temple*, something they had never expected. At the time of its dedication, the Dutch website of the LDS Church¹⁹ sported a reflec-

tive piece about the temple's presence in the Netherlands, exemplifying Dutch LDS feelings:

It seemed a dream, when it started: The Dutch speaking church would get its own temple? That was a boon we were not ready for, not by a long shot. But numbers seemed not to be all-important,²⁰ and gradually we saw the plans take form: Blue print, maquette and then the exciting months of the actual building. The open days were extremely well attended: Never before have so many people had a first-hand contact with the church, and never before did we see so many positive reactions to the Mormon presence in the Netherlands. All Dutch and Belgian Saints vividly remember the dedication services in September 2002 as their spiritual high point, both for the start of their temple and the rare occasion to see the prophet in the Low Countries.

The Dutch had never expected to have their own temple because of their limited number of members and the lack of growth. During a stay at the Frankfurt temple, I heard people "explain" that the country's constitutional monarchy would prohibit a closed building; after all, the story went, the queen has the right to enter any building in her realm. This is an urban legend as many buildings are closed to outsiders and no king or queen of the Netherlands has ever found it problematic. This kind of urban legend, however, is not a reflection on the absolute power of the queen—which she does not have—but on the LDS regard for the absolute holiness of the temple. For example, many of the Lowlands Saints thought that all people connected with the temple would have to be church members in good standing, i.e. with a temple recommend. However, reality is always more mundane than esoteric mythology. The temple in Zoetermeer was constructed by a large building firm in the Netherlands. The builders appeared to appreciate the special task. In an interview, the project manager remarked, "There was to be no swearing, no smoking, and no alcohol on the job, and all our people showed respect and understanding for this. More and more, I felt that what we were building was unique; this was going to be a temple in which members of your church would find inner peace."²¹ Apart from this, the building process as such was like any other and after dedication, security, maintenance, and fire personnel would of course have to enter the building when needed, according to normal safety regulations.



Figure 1. The queue to view the temple started in the rain (photo W. E. A. Van Beek).

Another reason for the Saints' astonishment was that there seemed no pressing practical need for the temple. From 1955 onward the Dutch went to the temple in Zollikofen ("Bern"), and beginning in 1987 the Dutch church province fell in the Friedrichsdorf ("Frankfurt") temple district. The four- or five-hour drive from the Netherlands to Friedrichsdorf was not considered a great problem. Nevertheless, some Dutch stake presidencies were convinced that a Dutch temple had to come, and took action. First, they tried to convince the area presidency in their semi-annual briefings of the need for a Dutch temple, and then they started scouting for a suitable location. Ultimately, the Rotterdam/The Hague area in the southwest of the Netherlands (the true "Holland") was chosen by the Salt Lake hierarchy as one major priority for any temple is staffing: the staff at a small temple should be able to commute to the temple and this region accounted for the highest number of members. In addition, the Zoetermeer ward, right in the center of this region, was housed in a former Protestant church building on a suitable site with the ap-



Figure 2. Before the tour the temple was explained to the visitors (photo W. E. A. Van Beek).

propriate zoning provisions, so the choice was in the end not very difficult.

The official announcement of the temple, on August 16th, 1998, created a stir in the Dutch LDS community and generated the setting up of a national temple committee and an enlarged PR committee.²² Dutch members followed the building process closely, and announcements about the temple were frequently made in the Dutch wards. In the Zoetermeer temple there was no first cornerstone but—in very Dutch style—the first foundation pole was ritualized, the building site being in a polder some four meters below sea level. At present, this is the only temple in Mormondom to be built that low, and some members expressed concern. Dutch society is very interested in issues surrounding climate change and sea level rise, so it was natural to ask what would happen to the temple if the polders flooded. The central leadership never spoke about this risk, as discourse on climate change is absolutely non-existent inside the wider LDS church.²³

The first spade ceremony (August 26, 2000), the first pole (December 26, 2000), the placement of the angel Moroni (September 21, 2001), the open house (at the end of August 2002), and the final dedication (September 8, 2002) were high points in the Mormon life of the Dutch Saints. Many visited the site regu-



Figure 3. Dutch Saints gather for the second dedication session of their temple (photo W. E. A. Van Beek).

larly to see the building rise and witness the “birth” of “their temple.” For public relations this too was a high point in the history of the Dutch church, as the local, regional, and national press maintained an interest in the project, with reports of all types. The building of the temple was used to introduce the church to as many Dutch people as possible, both in Zoetermeer and in the wider region. The open house drew some 33,000 visitors to the temple, as well as a considerable amount of press coverage. For the members, the apogee was the dedication by the prophet Gordon B. Hinckley on September 8, 2002,²⁴ when he delivered the dedicatory prayer in a series of four dedication sessions, three in Dutch and one in French.²⁵ Two days earlier, the “cornerstone box,” containing the scriptures of the church, books, periodicals, newspaper articles, and other articles, had been placed in a niche in one corner of the temple.²⁶

On the express wish of President Gordon B. Hinckley, the temple at Zoetermeer started operations immediately, on the Monday after the dedication. As the temple president and his wife had been called just two weeks earlier, and his counselors and the temple



Figure 4. The choir for the first dedication session of the Zoetermeer temple (photo W.E.A. Van Beek).

workers even later, this was quite a challenge for the fledgling Dutch temple organization, but the appointees had already been temple missionaries at the Friedrichsdorf temple and quickly settled into the job after a first few hectic weeks. Naturally, during these weeks many Dutch Saints were eager to experience their “own” temple. A routinization of the complex procedures necessary for the running of the temple was quickly and efficiently established, although gearing the opening hours of the temples to the needs of all the patrons was more difficult. Small temples are usually open by appointment only, but it was soon clear that this was not going to work in Zoetermeer, and eventually the new temple presidency decided on being open five days a week at specified times. This proved to be a large window for a small temple, and the risk of under-attended sessions became a reality under subsequent presidencies, and now the temple is open for half a week only.

Where Have All the Pilgrims Gone?

What were the effects of the Dutch temple on the Dutch LDS Church? The initial effects surfaced during the construction

phase. The temple was never more present for both the members and the outside world than during that year of building. All wards and branches made their pilgrimages to the site and members kept each other abreast of the progress in construction. Each ward had its representatives either on the committees or among the many volunteers for the open house. In terms of public relations, the construction year, which culminated with the open house, was the most productive time ever for the Dutch Saints. The amount of publicity generated self-confidence for a minority group used to general press neglect and occasional bad reporting.

Has the Dutch LDS Church changed more permanently following the arrival of the temple? Quite a lot was expected, at least by some authorities during the dedication. However, since at least the 1980s the level of membership in the Netherlands—as in most of Western Europe—has been stable: the number of new members matches the numbers who leave the church. In a church used to growth, this calls for an explanation.²⁷ One is the degree of the secularization of Western Europe;²⁸ another is the decreased popularity of the U.S. in Europe, where Mormonism is still seen as an essentially American religion.²⁹ Despite this, voices in the church's administration cry out for a "second harvest" in Europe. Has the temple in the Netherlands stimulated church growth? At the time of writing, after ten years, it would not seem to be the case.³⁰ The main body of converts in Europe now comes from immigrants, mainly from Africa and the Caribbean, but they form a more transient church population than do the ethnic Dutch.³¹

However, the temple has generated a feeling of "coming of age" of an organization with self-sufficiency and maturity, a feeling helped by the gradual transformation of a church of converts into a body of second- and third-generation members. It has also helped to establish a gradually emerging Dutch Mormon culture.³² The media attention helped to stimulate this self-awareness, as the gist of newspaper reports has been more positive than the Dutch Saints had been used to. Attendance at the main press conference was massive at a time when religious matters were considered less than interesting for the Dutch general public. The overall impression is that the press coverage has resulted in a normalization of the Mormon presence in the Netherlands and of

the church becoming one of the country's many Christian denominations,³³ at least during the days of intense publicity. The reactions of visitors were also gratifying for members, as positive astonishment colored many of the oral and written reactions.³⁴ The processes around the Dutch temple resembled to a large extent the Finnish temple experience, a temple that was built at about the same time and also serving a rather small body of members. In the Finnish case, public attention resulted in a lasting reduction of "otherness."³⁵ In the LDS church in the Netherlands, the effect of publicity seemed to be a more generic improvement in the general awareness of the Dutch public.³⁶ The number of referrals has not increased, however. Attention does not seem to translate into a receptiveness to missionary endeavors.

One curious effect has been on temple attendance. The church's general policy is to bring the temples to the people, and not the reverse. The end of the twentieth century saw an explosion of temple building and dedications, and in between 1999 and 2001 no fewer than 53 temples were dedicated.³⁷ When it was dedicated in 2002, the Zoetermeer temple was LDS temple number 114, one of the many new small temples. The goal of building more and smaller temples is to facilitate temple attendance. However, in 1994 David Buerger argued that as far as the available statistics showed, the average attendance per member was slowly dropping throughout the church despite the huge building program.³⁸ The 1990 changes in the endowment might have affected this trend, but as endowment figures are hard to come by, this still would have to be substantiated. Our experiences from the Zoetermeer temple indicate no incremental effect of the 1990 changes in the ritual. On the whole, Zoetermeer shows no increase in temple attendance compared to the Dutch attendance in Friendrichsdorf; in fact, the contrary has been the case. In its first year, 2003, not only was temple attendance in Zoetermeer by Dutch Saints lower than in the previous years of the Frankfurt temple,³⁹ but each following year the Zoetermeer temple has also shown a marked decline in attendance.⁴⁰ Zoetermeer endowment figures seemed to reach a stable level in 2006 and 2007, but then dropped again, to reach a nadir in 2010. The number started to climb again in 2011 and in the first half of 2012, but in no way is Dutch temple attendance expected to regain its pre-2003 level at the

Friedrichsdorf temple; the present attendance is estimated at about half of the former Friedrichsdorf attendance.

The sacred building for the Dutch Saints is not only a boon but also a burden. The Dutch temple district is small (the main reason for not having an accommodation center on the premises) and the church already demands a large investment in time from its few members. Although temples run mainly on “grey power,” i.e. retired people, the temple finds itself in logistical competition with the “everyday church”; the temple is often seen as an extra. This contrasts with those parts of the church with a large membership, where the temple offers a place for retirees to spend their time within the church. And, of course, the genealogical research needed to supply the temples with names is just as time-consuming. In a low LDS-density situation such as the Netherlands, temple callings, with the exception of callings as temple presidency, have to cede priority to this “everyday church.”

Some of the Dutch church leaders had in fact foreseen both the problems concerning time allocation and the lower attendance rates. It was clear in the days of the Frankfurt temple that several stakes on the outskirts of the temple district were more active in temple work. And in the London (Newcastle) temple before the building of the Preston temple, according to a temple president of the Newcastle temple, it was the Scots who led the British stakes in temple attendance in London, so the members at the greatest distance might well be the most active temple goers. This was routinely interpreted in terms of faithfulness but in fact a different process is at work here, namely pilgrimage. The LDS Church has no pilgrimage, at least none institutionalized,⁴¹ but this has not stopped members from inventing their own: visits to temples some distance away, such as Bern, London, or Frankfurt, for example, served as quasi-pilgrimages. Because of the distance, most members went for an entire week, and performed endowments all day, interspersed with other ordinances. They would stay in the adjoining hostel and experience an intense “holy week.” It was usually a highly social week as well, interacting with members from other wards and stakes. Plus, being in a foreign country, the temple trip provided the chance for some sightseeing and shopping. Distance was not seen as a problem, as members

mostly traveled together, and sometimes buses were hired, increasing the experience of “social traveling.” As in any true pilgrimage, the journey counted at least as much as the destination, and arrangements for travel dominated the discourse inside the wards for a long time in advance. After the temple week, all talks and testimonies were about the trip, about the spiritual experiences, and all social ties that were made were couched in terms of spirituality.

This unofficial form of pilgrimage ended with the building of the temple. Temple attendance in Zoetermeer is for one day, often one evening, and then people return home. For many older members today it is more difficult to attend the Zoetermeer temple than it had been formerly to attend the German one, because of the absence of adequate accommodation near the temple and a lack of group travel.⁴² Additionally, the Zoetermeer temple is located in one of the most congested traffic areas in the Netherlands, which may present another obstacle to attendance. In the final calculation this amounts to fewer endowments.⁴³ The temple pilgrimage is sorely missed. Occasionally members organize short trips to Frankfurt or London to regain some of the temple spirit best experienced in intensive cooperation for a whole week. Members are free to go but going beyond one’s district is not encouraged by the church hierarchy. A few members make their own pilgrimage route by visiting other temples in Europe, and Zoetermeer too is getting its—admittedly small—share of visitors from abroad. Most are Americans, including U.S. servicemen based in Germany, traveling through Europe and “doing the temples.”

In 2009 the Dutch temple presidency sent out a letter with new instructions for patrons in an effort to stimulate attendance at Zoetermeer. The tone of the letter was one of strictness and discipline, which provoked a negative reaction from the members. The temple presidency had to rescind the letter, and wrote a new, friendlier version. In their subsequent conversation with the local leadership⁴⁴ they did give instructions but also cultivated a free exchange of ideas: slowly, the notion seems to be arising that the temple is a buyers’ market as the members vote with their feet. Thus, what seems to matter most for the Dutch Saints is that they *have* a temple, not so much that they *attend* it.

Hierarchies of Sacredness, Sacred Hierarchies

In order to better understand the impact of the temple, the notion of the hierarchy of sacredness is important. The Dutch temple itself is part of such a hierarchy. Though there are differences in small and large temples, this does not count much for the members. A temple is a temple, and the stature of a huge temple, such as the Los Angeles one, and a much smaller temple, such as that in Zoetermeer, is not relevant for patrons.⁴⁵ However, the Salt Lake temple is still a case apart. The “Central Temple” carries a different status, as it is the temple the prophet and apostles attend. Its special status was highlighted in the Netherlands by a scholar from the Religious Education department at BYU at a recent well-attended fireside. He talked about ancient and latter-day temples, and the main recent temple in his presentation was the Salt Lake one, for which he claimed an inspired architecture. One other reason for the special place of the Salt Lake temple is that the ceremony is not on film but is dramatized by volunteer temple workers.⁴⁶

This hierarchy of temples underscores the central position of the General Authorities as *the* representatives of the Church and the holders of the “priesthood keys.” The central control of the temples is an effective expression of the general control of the Church, and the control of the General Authorities—sometimes referred to by the synonym “Salt Lake”—over temple issues is at the front of everybody’s mind. I once suggested moving a chair in one of the rooms of the temple, and received the dry commentary: “Brother, you do not comprehend how things work here.” All details come from America and are not allowed to change. In all practical matters, Dutch ownership of “their” temple is very limited indeed.

Central control evidently holds *a fortiori* for any changes in temple ritual. No Dutch Saint, however maverick, would dream of introducing changes in the endowment, as all ritual instructions come from Salt Lake and are implemented in all temples around the world without discussion or explanation. In fact, imagining a temple presidency adapting the ritual to local culture—an option that is standard in many other denominations⁴⁷—can only be a thought experiment. In practice, the notion is unthinkable. Con-

trol by the General Authorities over the ritual is absolute, just as is their control over where temples will be planned and built. At the semi-annual general conferences the announcement of new temples is one of the highlights of the conference. A special case was the announcement of the Rome temple. It created an audible stir in the usually quiet audience, as the LDS Church was, through the announcement, seen to be advancing into the heart of Roman Catholicism. But in all other respects the Rome temple followed normal procedure: the announcement came from the First Presidency, not from the European Area Presidency, let alone from the Italian stake presidents. And new temples are announced, not proposed for a sustaining vote.

The debate on the origin of sacredness mentioned in the introduction—the relative weight of ritual versus place—gets its own solution in Mormonism. Here ritual is the first mover as the new temples are constructed to allow the Saints easier access to the rituals. But the temples are also a *constructed* sacred place, a built environment with little regard to any inherent holiness attached to the building site. Thus the debate is resolved in Mormonism through the hierarchy itself, the notion of authority flowing downward, installing—and changing—the rituals as well as deciding, designing, and building the sacred places to perform them in.

This hierarchy and its control are unchallenged, and this is clearest in the changes in temple ritual. Modifications of ritual are not announced in General Conference—it is a public occasion and the Church does not discuss temple matters in public—nor are the changes announced through the regular ecclesiastical line, through area presidencies, stake presidencies, and bishoprics. In its long history temple ritual has often been modified,⁴⁸ and the routine of changing anything in ritual and presentation has become standardized. The implementation of these changes completely skirts ecclesiastical lines of authority, and the following description is based upon the experiences in the Dutch temple with the 2005 changes in the initiatories.⁴⁹ The communication stems directly from the Temple Department, which has a direct and continuously manned telephone line with all temples. The procedure is as follows: the Temple Department telephones the temple that a certain representative of the department will arrive at the airport and has to be met. The names of the welcoming

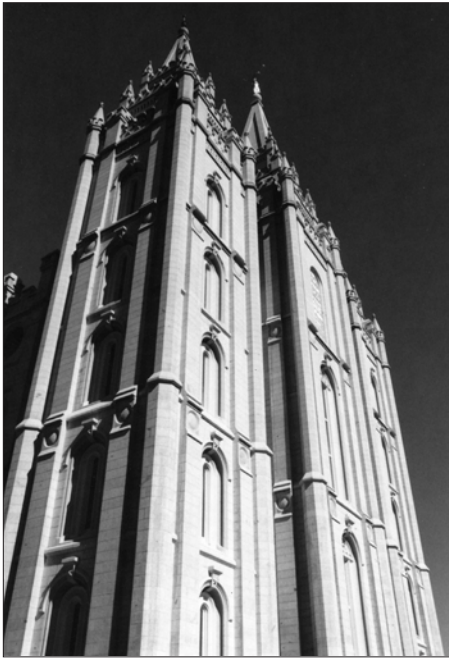


Figure 5. The Salt Lake temple (photo W. E. A. Van Beek)

party are given, and when they meet the representative at the airport all have to present identification. Then a DVD is handed over and signed for and the representative returns with the next flight. In the temple the DVD is put into the central temple computer and the DVD installs through its own programming all relevant changes, as well as some instructional films for the temple staff. Then, witnessed by a few temple staff, the DVD is destroyed in a special machine.⁵⁰

Most Dutch members knew nothing of any possible changes until they attended the temple after the changes had been implemented. If some changes affect rituals they seldom engage in, they will notice the changes much later still. For instance, the 2005 change in the preparatory ordinances is well known by those who perform and undergo them, but a large number of the temple patrons only do endowments. Even now, several years later, some members remain unaware of the change.

Not only is there a hierarchy *in* and *of* sacredness, hierarchy itself has some “ἱερος,” holiness, as well. The Dutch church leadership operates in the shadow of the prophet’s mantle, sharing

some of his authority. Comparing the church with other similar institutions, it is striking how visible LDS leadership is, especially the top tiers, and how well-known. Max Weber's notion of positional charisma is apt here: a General Authority, an apostle, and above all, the prophet, have tremendous charisma based upon the positions they occupy, but charisma is also attributed to them personally. The authority of the Brethren is unchallenged and any appeal they make to the membership should not and does not go unheeded, even in the far reaches of the international church such as the Netherlands. Thus, if representing the church and by implication Jesus Christ, the leadership deems it wise to make a change in temple ceremonies, members will not raise any objections. In fact, most of the changes consist of gently ousting the overt Masonic elements,⁵¹ a change welcomed by a continental European membership, where Masonry was never an important influence and that is, anyway, much less interested in this kind of symbolism than was nineteenth-century America. But given the sacredness of the hierarchy, changes are readily accepted, meaning that the control of the hierarchy, and thus the perceived sacredness of the hierarchy, is in no way diminished.⁵² It is considered their right to change the ceremony and, by exercising that right, their span of control is increased.

Control is also exercised when the Church tries to minimize the somatic aspects of the initiatory and of the main endowment, but European Mormons have fewer problems with somatic elements,⁵³ considering prudish American culture at odds with straightforward body symbolism. As John-Charles Duffy correctly argues, present western European culture is rather sexualized and has generally accepted homoerotic expressions that still are frowned upon by American society and even more so by the LDS leadership.⁵⁴

Dutch saints never challenge the hierarchy of holiness that is implicit in the temple. On the contrary, they use their temple to define their own distinctiveness from other denominations. After all, the European Saints, including the Dutch, live as tiny minorities in a landscape that is increasingly secular but whose secularity is shot through with the deep roots and former power of the mainline denominations. The visual icon of the cathedral in the inner cities in the Netherlands comes to mind here: from my study I can

hear the bells of several churches, but nothing “Mormon”; in Europe, Mormonism is Other. One dominant symbol of that otherness is indeed the Mormon temple, which is a stranger in the world of Christianity. This is what it means to be Dutch and Mormon and this is what the presence of the temple in Holland symbolizes.

The Dutch Temple and the Experience of the Sacred

Having one’s own temple can lead to the routinization of the sacred. No longer going on pilgrimage, Dutch Saints are exhorted to fix temple attendance into their weekly schedules and attend frequently. In Dutch understanding, this notion of routinization stands perpendicular to the notion of the sacred itself, pilgrimage events being much more apt for the experience of the holy. The temple ritual may be an act out of time, yet patrons still have fit it into a daily and weekly schedule. So for them it is no longer a “time out of time,” i.e. something “sacred,” but an item in their agenda. The sacred is not only routinized, it has also become “work,” mundane. This is even stressed by the leadership:

In recent temple dedications President Hinckley has suggested we not focus so much on the personal benefits of attending the temple but rather focus on temple work as “work.” While the personal blessings resulting from temple attendance are numerous, we must not lose sight of the fact that it is work and requires commitment and duty.⁵⁵

The end of pilgrimage, as mentioned above, has contributed to this shift. A pilgrimage as such is “time out of time,” but driving through traffic to the temple, after phoning home to check whether someone still has to be picked up, and just making it to the temple in time—to be gently chastised by temple staff for coming so late—is not conducive to an experience of sanctity. That is work indeed. Also, members tend to see temple service as work for others, more than for themselves, which sounds like a good piece of altruism but detracts from their own religious experiences.⁵⁶

With the “holy week” of the temple pilgrimage gone, the very nature of the temple experience has changed as well, into the direction of work—and for the Dutch the notion of work is not sacred at all. This dilutes the holy and detracts from the special po-

sition of the temple. This might be one additional factor for the decline in attendance. The temple experience has become more mundane, shifting from a holy week in a foreign country to temple work on Thursday evening in Zoetermeer (a little bit like home teaching). The Church hierarchy operates as if new temples increase the “special work” of holiness that is found within them, but in fact with a proliferation of temples an inevitable dilution sets in. Terry Givens points at a general paradox in Mormon religious culture, the reduction of the distance between the sacred and the secular, commenting on “Mormonism’s tendency to thoroughly infuse sacred space with seemingly pedestrian elements, or to conflate heaven and earth,”⁵⁷ or in Armand Mauss’s terms, the tension between the “angel and the beehive.”⁵⁸ When the Saints have to work like “industrious bees” in their most sacred place, the sacred character suffers, since the sacred has a necessary scarcity that cannot be reduced without cost. After all, the experience of the sacred, like any religious experience, almost by definition is distinct from everyday life, with an intermittent character that precludes planning and repetition. So, the paradox holds that planning and inspiration do not travel well together.⁵⁹

This routinization of the sacred seems to hold mainly for the patrons. The experience is different for those who are called to serve as temple presidencies, where their service is a long, liminal time that is experienced deeply. The three couples that make up the temple leadership experience their calling as a real time out of time, three years for the small temples. Looking back on their experience, the first presidential couple in Zoetermeer⁶⁰ fondly remember their temple years, love to speak about them, and express their deep, heartfelt gratitude for that special time. An interesting category here is the temple workers, situated as they are between patrons and presidents, serving part-time but for long periods. The ones I interviewed had their own solution for the paradox of the routinization of the sacred. They seem to have shifted the definition of their membership in the direction of the temple. For them the Sunday worship has become more marginal, a ritual to pass through in order to get at the temple, and it is at that very temple that they “live” spiritually. They are “temple dwellers,” and equate church service with temple work first, and ecclesiastical service second. Sitting out the Sunday, they can go

“home” during the week. This is reinforced by the fact that they are assigned to one specific temple only, but in the Netherlands there is no alternative at hand anyway. Their attachment is to one particular sacred building. One temple worker formulated it thus: “When you go to the temple, you go to the House of the Lord; when I go, I join my spiritual home.”⁶¹

Final Thoughts: The Internal and External Functions of the Zoetermeer Temple

With routinization accounting for a dilution of the intensity of the ritualized sacred, the Zoetermeer temple has taken on new functions. The temple in Nauvoo and the temples in Utah stood at the heart of a Mormon community, where people met under the direct aegis of spiritual leaders.⁶² The temples reinforced their self-definition as a special people, with a definition of specialness that linked past and present in ethnic terms. Jan Shippo has remarked that with the introduction of temple endowments, the covenants of the new dispensation interwove with those of ancient times,⁶³ while John Brooke highlights the way Joseph Smith through the temple rituals put Mormonism inside a long tradition of mystery religions.⁶⁴ But it was an ethnic mystery religion first of all, binding together a close-knit community by enhancing their identity and, above all, by transforming their worldly marginality into a spiritual boon. The temple ceremonies succeeded in redefining that marginality, transforming the rim into the centre, and turning virtual outcasts into a chosen people. Even though the U.S. overtook the Mormon Zion and Utah entered the Union,⁶⁵ the function of the temples in sacralizing the home territory remained. The litmus test of being not only a church but also a people was essentially the temple: a temple *of* Zion, a temple *in* Zion.

This ethnic ritual definition became less vital when the church moved out of its desert confinement and grew into an international institution, no longer the colony but itself colonizing,⁶⁶ a colonization process that eventually led to the Zoetermeer temple. The temple is a new place of sacredness in the Netherlands and whether they perform the rituals frequently or not does not matter any more: the sacred place has conquered the rit-

ual. The Dutch church province has come of age with its own temple, no longer dependent on temples in foreign countries.

The temple also has the potential to subtly change the relationship of the Saints to Dutch and Belgian society in a way that is somewhat at odds with its ritual otherworldliness. Dutch and Belgian Saints wish for recognition as valid members of their national religious scene. It is not the status as a peculiar people that is being sought but the status of a normal people, respectable Christians, good citizens. To some extent, they still have to learn that they are already there, that they have indeed arrived on the public scene. For Dutch Saints it is so normal to be marginal that they readily define their religion as private and irrelevant for the public space, a dominant trend in the past decade of Dutch religion anyway. This is the reason why the temple presidency, while commanding a building that is very present in the Zoetermeer public space, has never thought of really engaging in Zoetermeer civic life. They never showed up at the New Year reception at the town hall as it simply never occurred to them. If this changes in the future, this twin function of the temple will be confirmed: as a geographic symbol of sacred otherliness (internal) and a sign that Dutch Mormons are now part of the Dutch religious landscape (external).

This observation calls to mind, more than anything else in the LDS temples, the function of the temple in Jerusalem. The relation between Deseret and the temples in the “mission field,” such as Zoetermeer, in many respects reproduces the difference between the First and the Second Temple. The temple of Solomon was meant to be the only place of worship, and as such was in constant competition with other gods such as Baal or Astarte.⁶⁷ This First Temple was built upon a place which was already sacred, but which also accrued huge sacrality through the temple itself and helped define the Israelite people. Likewise, the first LDS temple united the people, sacralized not only its building space but also the ethnic habitat, its living space, and produced the imperative for ethnic gathering.⁶⁸ Kirtland, Nauvoo, Salt Lake, and the mythos attached to the Missouri temple site sanctified that part of America where the gathering could take place, transforming a wilderness into a garden.

The Second Jerusalem Temple, built after the Babylonian exile

and later expanded by Herod, functioned in combination with local congregations and synagogues. No longer was it the centre of a religious polity, but it became the focus of an internationalized Jewish population, all part of a much larger realm. In the Mormon case, its self-imposed exile in the Salt Lake Valley eventually produced a combination of chapel and temple, but the main change occurred during the days of expansion when the church moved out of its Rocky Mountain homeland. It took over a century to build its first temple outside the Mormon culture area,⁶⁹ but with that move out of Zion, the temple became a firm link between centre and periphery and a means for local denominational maturity. During the Second Temple period, the Jews in the Roman Empire saw their temple as a mark of identity. In the eyes of the Dutch Saints, the Zoetermeer temple, like other international temples, does not sanctify the city or the province but does mark their identity as Mormon-Dutch citizens of the European Mormon “empire.”

Notes

1. “Waar onder de hemel mensen dwergen zijn, waar de kerken de enige bergen zijn,” translation from the French by Ernst van Altena.

2. Harold W. Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Places of Worship* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979).

3. The temple district also includes Belgium and northern France and, unless otherwise indicated, the term “Dutch” Saints includes members from these stakes as well.

4. For two comprehensive treatments see Matthew T. Evans, “The Sacred: Differentiating, Clarifying and Extending Concepts,” *Review of Religious Research* 45, 1 (2003): 32–47; Arie Molendijk, “The Notion of the ‘Sacred,’” in *Holy Ground: Re-inventing Ritual Space in Modern Western Culture*, edited by Paul Post and Arie L. Molendijk (Leuven: Peters, 2010), 55–89.

5. Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987).

6. Ronald L. Grimes, *Rite out of Place: Ritual, Media and the Arts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

7. Smith, *To Take Place*, 104. Emphasis added.

8. Grimes, *Rite out of Place*, 15.

9. Paul Post and Arie L. Molendijk, “Introduction,” in *Holy Grounds in the Netherlands*, edited by Paul Post and Arie L. Molendijk (Leuven: Peters, 2009), 4.

10. David Brown, *God and the Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

11. Like most denominations, Mormonism likes to indicate its own rituals with a term that distinguishes them from the others. Catholics use “liturgy,” Mormons “ordinances” or “ceremonies,” but both are of course examples of the more generic term “rituals.”

12. The cases of the Kirtland and Nauvoo temples are illustrative here.

13. Such as branch president, stake president, high counselor, bishop’s counselor, teacher in various organizations including CES Institute, and member of the Dutch Public Affairs Committee.

14. Some of them are mentioned in the notes, but special thanks go to Paul van’t Schip, a former counselor in the temple presidency.

15. Bij Michael Butter, incorporated in Antonie A. Vreven, *Predik alle volken; de Geschiedenis van de Kerk van Jezus Christus van de Heiligen der Laatste Dagen in Nederland, 1861–2011* (Groningen: private printing, 2012). For a detailed description see Vreven, *Predik alle volken*.

16. Prof. van Leeuwen was the mayor of Zoetermeer while the temple was being built. At the ceremony of the first pole, which was also a new experience for him, he mentioned his visit to Salt Lake City in 1991 when he presented the Salt Lake City mayor with a Zoetermeer present, a salt and a sugar shaker, out of respect.

17. Interview with Mr. Waaijer, April 4, 2004.

18. The New Year reception is open to the public.

19. <http://www.kerkvanjesuschristus.nl>, accessed May 5, 2005.

20. The Dutch-Belgian LDS Church province has 11,000 members of record.

21. Vreven, *Predik alle volken*, 171–183.

22. For a detailed description see Vreven, *Predik alle volken*, 175–183.

23. At present, December 1, 2012, another hazard of polder construction appears: the grounds are sinking and the temple is slightly cracking at several spots.

24. Hinckley came from East Germany where, on September 7, he had rededicated the Freiberg temple in former East Germany, a temple which largely eclipsed the Zoetermeer one in internal Church publicity as the only temple ever built behind the Iron Curtain.

25. For the text see Vreven, *Predik alle volken*, 180–3. The Zoetermeer dedication prayer fits in well with the pattern set by Hinckley at other temples. For an analysis, see Samuel Brown, “A Sacred Code: Mormon Dedicatory Prayers 1836–2000,” *Journal of Mormon History* 32, no. 2 (2006): 173–196.

26. The list is in Vreven, *Predik alle volken*.

27. Mormons are not only used to growth, but operating under an ideology of growth as well. For some factual critique of this growth ideology, see Henry Gooren, "Analyzing LDS Growth in Guatemala; Report from a 'Barrio,'" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 33, no. 2 (2000): 97–116; and David Knowlton, "How Many Members Are There Really? Two Censuses and the Meaning of LDS Membership in Chile and Mexico," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38, no. 2 (2005): 53–78.

28. The leadership often blames the free sexual mores and liberal soft-drugs policy of the Netherlands for the lack of growth but this is not a hindrance to proselytizing at all since other Protestant groups, such as the Evangelicals, have no problem recruiting large numbers of youth in the same socio-cultural environment.

29. When the U.S. attacked Iraq in 2003, some chapels in the Netherlands were smeared with tomato ketchup and for several nights members slept in some of the meeting houses to guard them.

30. Bruce Van Orden, *Building Zion: The Latter-day Saints in Europe* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 219, 222.

31. Gary Lobb, "Mormon Membership Trends in Europe among People of Color: Present and Future Assessment," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 33, no. 4 (2000): 55–68.

32. Walter E. A. Van Beek, "Mormon Europeans or European Mormons? An Afro-European Look at Religious Colonization," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38, no. 4 (2005): 3–36.

33. Personal communication from Ineke den Hollander-Kirschbaum, then member of the Public Relations Committee, with the press portfolio, June 23, 2003.

34. Visitors could note their impressions on forms after the visit. The general impression was very favorable.

35. Kim B. Östman, "Esotericism Made Exoteric? Insider and Outsider Perspectives on the 2006 Mormon Temple Open House in Espoo, Finland," in *Western Esotericism*, edited by R. Ahlbäck (Abo, Finland: Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History, 2008), 124–38.

36. Ineke den Hollander-Kirschbaum in an e-mail reaction to me on Kim B. Östman, "'The Other' in the Limelight: One Perspective on the Publicity Surrounding the New LDS Temple in Finland," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 40, no. 4 (2007): 85–106.

37. Sociologist Rodney Stark has developed a hypothesis for the growth of the Mormon Church in general. See Rodney Stark, "The Basis of Mormon Success: A Theoretical Application," in *Mormons and Mor-*

monism. An Introduction to an American World Religion, edited by E. A. Eliason (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 207–42.

38. David J. Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 174, 175. He notes that in 1987 the Church stopped publishing endowment figures.

39. This figure was hard to estimate, as the data in the Friedrichsdorf temple do not allow for a precise breakdown on patron provenance. Through interviews with former temple missionaries at Friedrichsdorf and with officers of the three stakes in the Netherlands I arrived at a “guesstimate” of 9,000–10,000 Dutch endowments for 2002 in Frankfurt, including Flemish Belgium, as do the Zoetermeer figures. The first year in Zoetermeer, 2003, reported over 7,000 endowments, tapering off toward 4,000 in 2010. In 2012 they are expected to rise just over 5,000.

40. Measured in endowments performed for the dead, the majority of the temple work. The years 2004, 2005, and 2006 showed an annual decline of about eight percent. In 2007 the decline halted, to continue in 2008.

41. There are a few Mormon journeys, however, such as trips to see the pageants and the phenomenon known as “trek” wherein Mormon youth re-enact pioneer crossings. On Mormon historical sites as “Mormon Meccas,” see Michael Madsen, *Mormon Meccas: The Spiritual Transformation of Mormon Historical Sites from Points of Interest to Sacred Space* (Ph.D. diss., Syracuse University, 2003) and for Europe, Ronan James Head, “Creating a Mormon Mecca in England: The Gadfield Elm Chapel,” *Mormon Historical Studies*, 7, nos. 1–2 (2006), 89–101.

42. The Dutch temple committee tried to have some kind of hostel arrangement near the temple but this was not allowed by the central authorities as it did not fit the standards for a small temple.

43. The temple presidency used to report attendance numbers to the stake presidencies in their temple district but were advised no longer to do so because it would be discouraging for members. Reporting to the temple department was considered sufficient.

44. Rotterdam stake on October 12, 2009.

45. A small temple can only accommodate one group at a time, usually by appointment. Its presidency should live within commuting distance and it has no temple missionaries. Nor does it have hostel or cafeteria facilities. Most of the temples built in the last decade are small temples.

46. In some older temples this is done as well, such as in Manti and Logan, but few people in the Netherlands are aware of that.

47. For instance, denominations operating in Africa show numerous

adaptations to local norms of worship, such as drumming and dancing as part of services. The LDS church in Africa does not adapt in this way, not in the regular services and surely not in temple ritual.

48. Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness*.

49. These changes have been analyzed also in terms of ecclesiastical control of the body; see John-Charles Duffy: "Concealing the Body, Concealing the Sacred: The Decline of Ritual Nudity in Mormon Temples," *Journal of Ritual Studies* 21, no. 1 (2007): 1–21.

50. This information stems from interviews with members of the temple presidencies of the Zoetermeer temple.

51. For such a subtle denial, see G.W. Scharffs, *Mormons & Masons; Setting the Record Straight* (Orem, Utah, 2006). For a more balanced reaction, see Armand Mauss, "Culture, Charisma and Change: Reflections on Mormon Temple Worship," in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20, no. 4 (1987): 77–83.

52. Duffy's analysis regarding the power of Church authorities over the members' individual bodies is both productive and interesting. See John-Charles Duffy, "Concealing the Body, Concealing the Sacred."

53. Many ex-Mormon blogs register the shocked reactions of young American LDS on the embodied aspects of the endowment. In Europe this kind of reaction is seldom mentioned.

54. The LDS stance on California's Proposition 8, which exerted heavy public and political pressure against gay marriages, was accepted among most LDS in the U.S. but created problems of conscience for the few European Mormons that were aware of it.

55. www.lds.org (accessed August 17, 2009).

56. Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 81.

57. Terryl Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 46.

58. Armand Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

59. *Ibid.*, 121.

60. Anne and Elly Hulleman, interviewed by the author on January 10, 2008.

61. Bauke Elzinga, in a conversation with the author in August 2012.

62. Richard D. Poll, "Utah and the Mormons: A Symbiotic Relationship," in *Mormons and Mormonism. An Introduction to an American World Religion*, edited by E. A. Eliason (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 164–79.

63. Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 63–64.

64. John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

65. The classic treatment is Armand Mauss's *The Angel and the Beehive*.

66. Van Beek, "Mormon Europeans or European Mormons?"

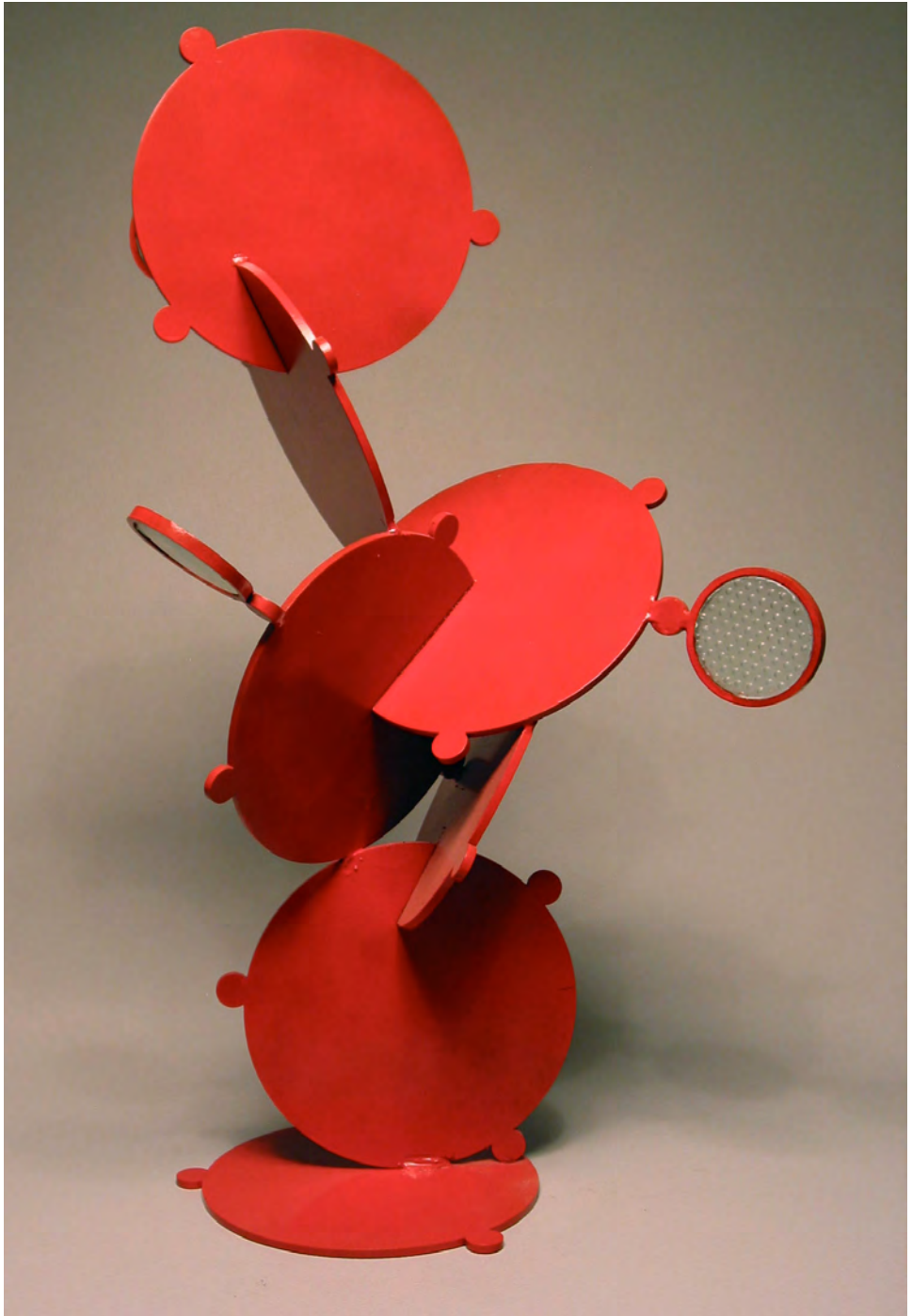
67. The Reformation of Josiah (2 Chron. 34–35), in which the major part of Deuteronomy was produced, forms the best illustration of that struggle for ritual hegemony. See Erik Eynikel, *The Reform of King Josiah and the Composition of the Deuteronomic History* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

68. Armand Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana/Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

69. This was the Bern, Switzerland, temple (which actually is in Zollikofen), built in 1955.



Brian Christensen
Babble, steel/stainless steel,
25"x 18"x 16"



Brian Christensen
Discus, steel/cast glass,
32"x 15"x 18"

My Mother Tongues

Michael Hicks

You can't forget your first time. Mine was in the back of a beige '68 VW bus, which I'd just bought from my mom's boyfriend. I was taking Annie home from an Assemblies of God revival meeting. She wasn't my girlfriend. She was—though she'd never say it—too good for me. I was a high school freshman hippie wannabe, dirty blond hair swirled behind my ears and wearing a khaki army jacket with a purple "Love" patch sewn on the left shoulder. Annie was older, graduated, smart and chic, and worked a desk job at IVC. When we pulled up at her curb that night, I slid open the side door of the van and we sat on the ledge, talking about the one thing she said I had left to do. She kept smiling as she breathlessly explained how easy it was and how right it felt. "All you have to do," she said, "is let your tongue go." And so, hoping she'd like me better if I did it, I took her hand and at 11:17 that warm Sunday night in late summer 1971, awkwardly, like a stuttering first grader, started to speak in tongues.

It was no torrent of syllables, that cascade of "eeko-shanda-halala-baba" I'd heard in the revival service that night. It was more a dribble of phonemes. And it was in the quiet voice of prayer, not conversation, let alone shouting. Like a penitent's prayer it kept getting stuck, then restarting. Annie spoke at the same time as I did and kept squeezing my hand as though milking it. Her tongues were smooth, slick, confident. She'd done this for years. If I was a leaky spigot, she was the Jordan River—though I thought my spiraling syllables were more colorful. My tongues-speech was like a studio remix of other languages, snippets of Spanish, French, German, Hebrew, Russian, sliced and respliced into a new language. Annie's was more uniform, direct and plain.

Still, imagine playing your first jazz solo in front of Miles Davis. That's what it felt like. How did I do it? Well, I'd prepared.

Studied up, taken mental notes, and wired spiritual gusto into my brain from the power grids of Pentecostalism.

* * *

I was baptized a Southern Baptist in San Jose, California, at the age of six. We heard only English in that church—sterile, Bible-based sermons every week. But by the time I turned nine my parents divorced; my mom whisked me into an apartment across the street from our old house and started taking me to Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto. That same year our school district gave us all I.Q. tests. My score was high and for the next two years the city bused me across town to a special school where I started Spanish classes in the fifth grade. My first encounter with another tongue. I hated it. But I was good at it.

One night in sixth grade my mom left me home alone and came back the next day with a new husband she'd married in Reno. My special school days soon ended; I enrolled in a rowdy junior high in town and, egged on by a squirrely cousin with a knack for petty crime, I launched into a year and a half of shoplifting, burglary, glue-sniffing, pot-growing, barefoot hitchhiking, and stashing whiskey and Grove Press books in my junior high locker. Two suspensions from school later, Mom's Reno marriage crashed and I got hit with a new blow: I broke into a car for what must have been the hundredth time, but this car turned out to be owned by a juvenile public defender. He saw me stealing his stick shift knob, ran up and grabbed me, slammed me against the hood of his car, then called his cop friends, who took me to jail. The cops kept phoning my mom but couldn't reach her till two A.M. She was out late with her new boyfriend—an amateur pornographer whose ex-wife had once threatened Mom with a shotgun.

The public defender didn't defend me. I got six months probation.

This plot was not turning out right for a Baptist boy genius. Still, I cut almost all of my freshman year in high school and lay in front of the TV in my underwear, except when I was meeting with my probation officer, drinking what liquor I could from Mom's stash, and teaching myself how to play piano and guitar. Sundays I went to church. It was hell, till John Fischer got hired as a new

youth minister at our church. He formed a garage band, I passed the audition, and we started rehearsing. John quickly detected how brazenly unreligious I was, and, as a condition of staying in the band, got me reading *Good News for Modern Man*.

That grey paperback book was the semi-official New Testament of Jesus Freaks, of whom I was about to become one. What sucked me in? A parade of late-sixties providence. My best friend, Larry, started shooting heroin; two girls at high school got raped by a guy who picked them up hitchhiking; I barely talked my way out of arrest for shoplifting, nearly got caught growing my pot crop in the heating closet, and, worst of all, had to spend two summers with my real dad, a schizoid Southern Pacific switchman who bullied and whipped me between taking me to ballgames and the railroad yard. Then another girl I knew drowned in the Pacific—her dismembered torso, chewed up by sharks, washed up weeks later. I got so scared I started to read *Good News* seriously for the first time. About two a.m. one night I prayed, begged Jesus to help me feel something, anything but fear, and felt a sudden peace, maybe for the first time in my life. With that, I took off on a solo flight into my new life.

I'd hated Spanish before, but now, at a high school that was forty percent Mexican, I savored it—for example. I understood what some people were saying about me, the skinny Jesus Freak who toted a fat black Bible around campus each day. Secret eavesdropping got me obsessed with learning foreign languages. I took classes not only in Spanish, but in French and German as well. I tried to take Latin, too, but no one else wanted to, so the only Latin teacher turned me down. No mind: I studied it on my own from books at the city library next door to campus. I saved up money I made selling drawings and bought pocket-sized manuals on Hebrew and Greek as well—the biblical languages, which I craved to learn. I bought up Living Language record sets in Italian and Russian from the local St. Vincent de Paul store. When a boy from Egypt joined our sophomore class, I got him to teach me a little Arabic.

A girl in my art class, Diana, noticed my Bible and recruited me into her Bible study group. Every Tuesday night we met, read aloud from the New Testament, shared thoughts on what we'd

read, then had long silent prayers—well, not silent, but whispered, all of us breathily praying to Jesus for a half-hour or more. Now and then, I'd hear half-voiced senseless syllables bubbling up around the room. I guessed this must be speaking in tongues, which sprouted up in so-called "charismatic" church groups, not to mention the old-line holy-roller churches I'd shunned out of what I thought was good taste. Speaking in tongues was authentic, my Bible study friends notified me: just read First Corinthians 12 and 14 and Acts 2. Those texts formed the power plant of this extravagant new neurological gospel, where one knew one had been "spirit-filled" only by speaking in tongues.

Seemed like a natural fit for a language geek like me. But most of it that I heard didn't sound bona fide. It babbled and shuddered. The languages I studied didn't. Now and then a church friend would brag about how someone heard their speaking in tongues and identified it as some African dialect or, in one case, "Ancient French" (Annie told me that one). I needed anecdotes like that. Because I wanted to believe, and, more to the point, I wanted to speak in tongues myself. Because that was how you got "full gospel" status in Diana's Bible study group—which was now pretty much the total population of my friends.

So I tried an experiment. I took my little reel-to-reel tape recorder around campus for a week, taping every authentic foreign language speaker I knew. I also taped a few of my friends speaking in tongues. Then I'd listen to all of them in sequence and see if the tongues sounded as real as the known languages. I taped friends who spoke Hindi, Serbo-Croatian, Farsi, and all the standard European languages. I even got a lapsed Jew to recite his old bar-mitzvah texts into the microphone. The real language speakers loved being archived this way. And my tongues-speaking friends loved the thought I might validate their gifts. They happily recorded their devout mumbling into my machine.

I listened over and over to the twenty-minute tape. I tried hard to hear tongues sounding like "real" languages. But it was tough, partly because I knew which was which. I played the tape for friends who didn't know what I'd done and asked them if they could identify the languages. I hoped no one would say, "Hey, that one's not a real language." But linguistic competence at Mountain View High was rare. And most of it was in my own head.

I wish I'd kept the tape. But I had no money and had to keep using the same three-inch reel for everything, including, this time, James Taylor on the radio.

Our Bible study group drifted from church to church, everything from old-line Assemblies of God to the New Sweet Home Church of God in Christ, where we were the only white people in the room. We went to revival meetings in big tents, crack-of-dawn prayer meetings in cramped storefronts. Everywhere we went, people spoke in tongues. Much of it sounded grotesque—a kind of spasm where syllables got squeezed out by God like paste from a tube. The speakers convulsed as they held their hands up, shaking, crying, and if the spirit was strong, collapsed on the floor. They blubbered from the top of their speaking range down to the bottom. Phony, I thought, though ecstatic, like whirling dervishes. Maybe divine, but not from a God you'd want to spend much time with.

Some tongues-speaking was calmer, almost matter-of-fact in the way the random syllables rolled from the speakers' mouths. Evangelists often interjected it between English sentences as they held the arms of folks on whom they were about to lay hands, letting each person fall back on the floor, quivering—a move they called being “slain in the spirit.” These interjections usually sounded like “she bought a Honda” or some similar phrase. I went back and forth on whether to trust them. The tongues-speaking I admired most came from the lips of John Hole (pronounced “hula”), a retiree from Denmark who spoke English with an accent and seemed to speak in tongues with the same accent. How much Danish was in his tongues-speaking, I had no clue. But it was sing-songy and lyrical. He sometimes stood up in Calvary Gospel Temple and started up with it, even interrupting the pastor's sermon.

I held out for a long time. I was not only skeptical, I was shy to boot. But Annie took me through the door. For her, I'd let my tongue go. I could feel the syllables form in my mouth, a divine confection of all the languages I'd studied. It was like scat singing, but without the melody, a stumbling improvisation from the huge cache of phonemes stored in my self-educated tongue. I remember lots of the words—I said them for years—words like “puriaki”

and “kantistima.” If I worried that other people’s tongues sounded too little like real languages, I worried that mine sounded too much like a mere collage of foreign words I knew. But the spirit burned in me so strongly, I learned to snuff out worry.

Once I’d done it with Annie, the word spread. And the news became my password to the inner circle of the group.

Tongues were mostly for prayer, I heard, so I tried praying in tongues for longer and longer spells—even timing myself with the chrome alarm clock in my bedroom to see how long I could go. I handwrote a two-page list of people I knew who might need a boost from God, bowed over the list, held each name in my mind for a moment, pressed my hand on the paper, and kept whispering generic praise talk, peppered with tongues, for up to an hour at a time.

Our group started holding prayer meetings at six o’clock each morning at Diana’s house—technically her mom, Alice’s, house. Alice was the matronly, grinning, recovered alcoholic who mothered the group. She was Aimee Semple McPherson with half the charisma and one-tenth the glamour. When we met for prayer in her living room, we all knelt or slumped on whatever furniture we could claim—footstool, couch, chairs, and the giant furry pillows everyone seemed to own in the early ’70s. We softly moaned, “we love you Jeeeesus,” “we praise you Jeeeesus,” or just “Jeeeesus,” till someone spoke up, burst out with a prophecy or tongues-plus-interpretation. A prophecy was a message from God, speaking in his native English to the group, a short soliloquy in a loud voice. Tongues were the same format, but needed an interpretation, which someone besides the tongues-speaker had to give. The rub was this: if you spoke in tongues, you hated for someone to interpret it as a warning, or worse, a curse. And if you interpreted, you wanted to make sure the person who kicked off this two-step voice-of-God interlude felt well repaid for speaking out in half-crazy syllables then waiting for someone to make sense of it. So it was a dicey process.

What were the messages? Ersatz Isaiah, whose book we read all the time, as though preparing a dramatic monologue for an audition. Touches of the Psalms. Generic fond phrases about how we were His chosen ones, His beloved children, and so on. At its best, a message answered some collective inquiry we’d made,

sometimes with a plain “go ahead,” etc., or, more obscurely, a “continue on the path you’ve begun to walk,” which was small help, but made us feel tingly.

We did all this God-talking for two years. In that time God told us to visit four female wards at Agnews State Hospital every Sunday, singing and praying with women who talked funny in their own right. He told us to rent a cinder block building in Sunnyvale for a coffee house/drop-in center on a corner where one road ran into a low-rent suburb and the other into the parking lot of a topless bar. He told us to mortgage a house in that suburb and convert it to a halfway house for druggies and drunks. He told us to refurbish a slummy eight-unit apartment complex in Mountain View for a second, much bigger halfway house. We did all those things.

We had good credit but no credentials for all this ad hoc social work. We’d just make our halfway-house clients garden, cook, clean, repaint walls, and, of course, listen to us talk about how Jesus could help them get better. We laid hands on clients and prayed for them. And we sang gospel songs at all hours, Jim Newell and I strumming guitars and everyone clapping. When the clients went to sleep we had more prayer meetings. Then we had them again in the morning before anyone got up. Tongues flowed in every meeting.

We sang in tongues, too, most often at the end of a song, where we called it “singing in the spirit.” We’d hit the last chord and then keep singing in pentatonic scales (think the black keys on the piano), soaring ditties with ad hoc lyrics that mimicked our prayers, all checkered with tongues. These singing spells would last five minutes or maybe ten, maybe more—hard to say, since we were trying to stay outside time in a kind of mock-eternity. Heaven help us if we let a clock on the wall curb our praise.

Although I sang in tongues from time to time in private prayers, I had one semi-operatic tongues-singing moment—or, should I say, weekend. Our group—which we now called the “Wineskin Group,” from Matthew 9:17—took a trip to the Santa Cruz Mountains. We met in a friend-of-a-friend’s cabin that I saw had a record player and a Gregorian chant LP. It was a kind of music I’d never heard. It was like tongues-singing, I thought, only

better. I kept putting it on as background music while people milled around and talked. On an urge, I got up and walked far into the woods where I thought no one could hear me and started singing at the top of my lungs, some in tongues and some in English. Then I went back into the cabin and put the chant record back on. When my friends made me shut it off, I went back into the woods and started up again.

Such was the life of a Pentecostal Jesus Freak splashing through the undertow of the Sixties. In this little New Testament counterculture, tongues made me feel both more-than-human and less-than. It came from God, I thought, but also from a pit in the brain buried so deep it seemed like a dinosaur bone. Language that exceeded language, I thought, and yet a language that hadn't yet turned into one—formless, murky, and sometimes not much more than a toddler's prattle.

* * *

As quickly as the Wineskin Group had once jelled, it soured. Pastor Rounds, the preacher at Calvary Gospel Temple, took sick and died. We were half the choir on his radio show, "Camp Meeting Time," where we took turns bearing testimony into the microphone as he played banjo and the choir clapped in time. Once he died, his successor dropped the show and threw us out of his church because we wouldn't give back the printing press the church had given us to print our own tracts and halfway house ads. We spent weeks writing a defense of our right to the machine, typed it up, printed it on that very press, and stood on the sidewalk in front of the church one Sunday passing the document out to stunned churchgoers. That cut our last cord to any regular church.

Alice started drinking again and having nightly apocalyptic visions and daily public conversations with an invisible Jesus. Her screwy conduct and the liquor on her breath began to ward away clients from the halfway houses and the employment agency she used to finance them. Jim, my guitar-strumming partner, moved away. A "concerned citizens" group started a petition to shut down our apartment complex because they thought the drunks and addicts were a threat to the neighborhood. The leader of that

group stood up at the city council, started his rant against us, and fell over dead. A sign from God, we thought. The neighbors got scared of us, not our clients. But our creditors weren't scared of either and within weeks we had to move out: clients, furniture, dishes, tools, even the printing press. We went into foreclosure and I started to drink again. I ditched my Christian friends and started a garage band. I stopped speaking in tongues and started peppering my English with its two foulest words.

But like any ghost, the Holy Ghost can haunt you. I kept nosing through churchy books and tracts and tuning in to broadcast preachers from Reverend Ike to Oral Roberts to Jim Jones. On a dare I went to a Mormon sacrament meeting in Los Altos. Six months later, I was a sober, short-haired, brown sportcoat-wearing, tithe-paying Mormon. I'll leave the conversion story for another time, though I will say I couldn't have joined up without the church's Articles of Faith assuring me it believed in tongues and interpretations. Of those I was a fan, an expert. But what came with them now was the church's headier, semi-intellectual twentieth-century past, not to mention its modern-day "Pursuit of Excellence" program. Which I needed.

Still, I never heard anyone speak in tongues at church. I soon learned that Mormons had redefined tongues into the ability to learn languages faster in order to do missionary work. That was okay, though, because I didn't really want to speak in tongues anymore myself and happily traded the Pentecostal intoxication of my teens for the sturdier intellectual side I saw in the church—this was, after all, near Stanford University, where *Dialogue* had been born a few years earlier. I was ready, even ripe, for the reinterpretation of tongues.

In time I learned that early Mormons used to speak in tongues the way I had. I wondered if they had the same intimate bond with what I now call my "mother tongues"—the tongues I was raised on after being born again in the wilderness of Jesus Freakdom. Did those Latter-day Saints wonder about the mental sources of their divine blather? Did they compete for the sweetest, most affective tongues-speaking? Were tongues that miracle that helped enshrine their faith in the halls of authenticity they claimed?

No matter. Nowadays, I'm happy to siphon and filter my faith through something between high-church scholastic exegesis and the lowbrow cant of modern populist Mormondom. In a way, the life I lead as an LDS scholar bears its own multilingual traits. One has to speak in many tongues of faith to peel away one's complex personal orthodoxy. Still, the glossolalia at which I became proficient as a teenager has slid from my vocabulary.

Well, not quite. A couple of years ago, sleepless from a racing mind, I conceived a way to quiet it. Lying in bed, I started to move my lips and let them slowly unwrap again the gift of tongues. The thoughts in my skull started to slow. I was whispering God's special language and feeling the peace that—as St. Paul put it—*passeth understanding*. I quickly fell asleep under what I'd never realized was both the corniest and most blissful sedative.

I don't know who said it first, but we are what we remember. As I coast down the downhill path of middle age, I find myself grabbing for whatever shrubs of the past can slow me down, keep the many-faced "me" of five and a half decades from slipping away. So I have got this crazy little addiction again. When I'm lying on my side in the dark, I often slip into that old familiar nonsense—my mother tongues, completely dubious and therefore transcendent. Many a night around three A.M. they drive me past the road sign that reads "understanding" into the darkness where the vivid, restless "I" of my brain can get lost again, go blissfully extinct till I awake into the next Mormon morning.

Deaths and (Re)births

Jacob T. Baker

Descent

2004 is mostly a blur. My memory is shrouded in a merciful haze. Odd or trivial details emerge vividly sometimes. I can recall returning home from work one day, trudging slowly up the steps to the small two-bedroom apartment in which my wife and I lived, newly graced with the presence of our twin son and daughter, born a few months before. I winced as I climbed, consciously slowing my ascent, wanting the short journey to the door—like Zeno’s speeding arrow that never arrives at its target—to never end. I was physically and emotionally exhausted and had been since the day of the twins’ birth, but the wince derived from anticipation of what would inevitably greet me behind that door. Taking a deep, resigned breath (and feeling guilty—again—for not wanting to come home) I turned the door handle and stepped inside.

It was, by now, an all-too-familiar scene: baby clothes, diapers (some used, some not), bouncy seats, and a hundred other little items related to child care scattered all over the floor and the furniture. Bits of sepia-colored carpet showed here and there, islands in a sea of infant detritus. As I looked across the room and into the small kitchen, my gaze rested on my wife, Amanda. Her overall appearance was but one symptom of the devastation that had taken its toll on even the most mundane of our repetitive daily routines. “Disheveled” would hardly describe it. She was in her usual half-dressed state. Bedraggled tresses of her unkempt brownish-blond hair shot out in a dozen directions. If I recall accurately, she had essentially stopped doing her hair at all except for on Sundays when we would attend church services. Makeup and other self-grooming habits had suffered a similar fate. One of the twins (I forget if it was Ethan or Mylyn) was perched expertly

on her hip while she finished cooking dinner. Two surprises, then, contradicting my prophetic expectations during the long climb up the stairs. One—she was not in that suffocating prison of a rocking chair holding both babies, as was normally the case. I surveyed the room and could see that the other baby was in one of the bouncy seats, distracted (no doubt briefly) by some children’s show on television. Two—she was making dinner. Dinner was an enterprise we had long since mostly given up in favor of fast food that we consumed robotically, without tasting.

I gingerly stepped across islands of carpet to the kitchen, calling out my usual greeting. She replied without turning around, “Hi.” Even before I reached her the baby in the living room began to cry. Amanda turned to me, her face emotionless: “Here.” I took the baby in my arms, raising her (or him; I can’t remember) up in the air and cooing, hoping for a smile. Amanda made her way into the living room, picked up the crying baby, and waded through the Sea of Infant Flotsam and Jetsam to the rocking chair, where she began nursing. Not more than a minute passed, however, and the baby I was holding also began to cry. “Bring (him/her) over here,” Amanda called to me, in a flat, indifferent voice. The voice did not match her facial expression—she smiled lovingly at the two babies now positioned on the custom nursing pillow made for twins that we had found online prior to their birth. I still marveled that she could nurse two babies at the same time.

My heart sank (again) as I looked around at the hurricane-like devastation in the apartment. It was a discouraging sight, as always. The kitchen looked much like the living room, with dirty dishes, pots, pans, and food stains filling every available surface. As on so many days before this one, I was at the moment of impossible decision; my entire life, in fact, had been reduced to the daily repetition of this one choice: Should I help my wife in some sort of significantly constructive way? Or should I dig into the nearly untouched mountain of homework and studying that had piled up during the course of the semester? It didn’t matter which horn of the dilemma I immolated myself on. Either way, it would be an all-nighter. We had not, in fact, really slept in months. I felt like Sisyphus, who was condemned to manhandle a boulder up the side of a mountain and then watch it roll back down again for eternity. In Albert Camus’ interpretation, Sisyphus’ challenge was to

discover any sort of purpose or meaning in that one everlastingly repetitive act. Of course, Sisyphus had no choice in his task but to physically repeat it over and over again, against his will. His descent to the bottom was eternal. By contrast, I theoretically had a choice, but—surveying the damage one more time, seeing my wife slumped in her rocking chair, drifting out to sea—there was really nothing substantive about that choice. Our descent into discouragement and despair scraped against the same texture of eternity. I began clearing the table, burying my shoulder and my neck into the side of my now familiar boulder, bracing myself to once again begin pushing.

Fall

“Well, I have good news for the two of you. First, it’s a boy. Second—he has a sister.”

All it took was one perfectly timed and perfectly worded sentence from our ultrasound technician to cause my appetite to disappear completely for forty-eight hours. Twins. It was unimaginable. During that period I experienced varying waves of total euphoria and mind-numbing fear. Admittedly, it was mostly euphoria. The bragging rights were, after all, unparalleled. Not only naturally-conceived twins on our first excursion into replenishing the earth, but opposite-sex twins as well. Apollo and Artemis, just like that.

Surely, we were gods.

I’ll never forget calling my parents, for whom these would be their first grandchildren.

“Dad, we just got back from the ultrasound.”

“*And?*” Dad’s voice sounded anxiously through the phone receiver.

“Guess.”

“It’s a boy, like you thought.”

“Yes. It’s a boy.”

“That’s fantastic, son! We’re so excited for you!”

This was so delicious. “And he has a sister.”

Long pause. Then, “What? What do you mean? It’s a girl?”

Wait for it. . . .

“*Oh my gosh!* Are you saying what I think you’re saying?! *Twins?!* I can’t believe it!” Now he was sobbing like a child, overcome with

joy. I was surprised to realize that my father's rapture was even more thrilling than the news itself. His joy was confirmation of a gift—that kind of gift all sons try to give their fathers in order to prove their worth to them as men, by excelling in sports or succeeding in a lucrative profession. I had been trying to give him such a gift my entire life, and had only succeeded in this event. It was a supremely unforgettable moment.

Amanda's pregnancy was difficult. She had severe versions of typical pregnancy nausea and migraines. But she also experienced dreadful cramping on one side of her abdomen, cramping that could only be assuaged by long walks. Dark three o'clock strolls around our sleeping neighborhood became commonplace for us. Many days she could barely move because of the pain, and doctors were at a loss to explain the origins or offer options for alleviation. It was almost a relief when Amanda's water broke at thirty-one weeks. Almost. Unfortunately, one of the babies was breech, so Amanda had to have an emergency cesarean section. She was frightened. We both were. Our obstetrician was called to the hospital and arrived fairly quickly. We frankly didn't like him—he was pushy, uncaring, and never listened to Amanda and her questions and concerns. But, since this was Provo, Utah, he also happened to be a stake president and he asked me if I wanted to give her a blessing before she went into surgery. I was grateful for that; in all the fear and commotion I hadn't thought about it. He anointed her head and I gave a short blessing. A moment later Amanda was on the operating table.

The surgery went well and both the babies were whisked off to the NICU before I could really catch a good glimpse of them. Later I would see and hold them, of course, and they were beautiful, though so tiny: about four pounds each, a pretty good size, really, for arriving nine weeks prematurely. But my immediate concern was Amanda. She was barely out of the operating room, but her medication seemed to be wearing off far ahead of schedule. She was in severe pain from the surgery, from the yanking and tearing that was necessary to extract the babies through the small incision in her lower abdomen. Nurses came in, followed by doctors. She was gasping, crying, screaming. The consensus was that they had not successfully "gotten on top of the pain," meaning, apparently, that the amount of morphine administered after the

surgery had not been enough. (She would have this same problem in subsequent deliveries). Now it would take some time for the newly administered medication to take effect. It was like being strapped to a chair and forced to watch your spouse be senselessly tortured. There was nothing I could do, and it went on for hours. I vaguely remember screaming at a nurse that if she couldn't do anything then no one could. How was no one able to do anything to relieve her suffering? How could this have happened? It went on and on. I was a sweaty mess just from watching it, just from trying to be with her to the extent I could. But I knew my own exhaustion was nothing in comparison to hers. Over the next several days, in fact, she would be in indescribable agony from her surgery. I do not know to this day whether the hospital's pain-management policy was too conservative or the medication simply didn't work, but she experienced little relief until she was released from the hospital.

In the midst of all the pandemonium, I remember a cousin of mine, a woman I hadn't seen in years, knocking on the hospital room door with a bouquet of flowers in her hand. By this time I was weeping over my utter inability to help my wife as she thrashed about and pleaded for relief. "Thank you," I whispered as I took the flowers, my voice trembling. She could see that we were all in distress and that she would not be able to help. She squeezed my hand, smiling as her concerned eyes clearly conveyed, "I'm so sorry," and she quickly left.

I was numb. This couldn't be real. I had never had to be a helpless witness to such suffering. Something was not right, something bigger than the material suffering in front of me. Something cosmological and universal and foundational was quivering and trembling to the point of breaking—but I didn't ask the Question, the question that so often comes to the believer in the midst of intense suffering. Well. *Other* believers. Not me. I refused the Question. I thought that if I had it set before me, comfortably but persistently gazing into my soul, awaiting my response, I would crumble into nothing. No, it would not be allowed anywhere near me.

My father-in-law arrived soon after. He asked if Amanda needed a blessing. I mumbled between tears that I had already

given her a blessing, much good that had done, but affirmed that one could be given again. Barely able to speak, I indicated that I was in no condition to pronounce the blessing and asked him to do it instead. This time I anointed her head and her father was voice. Nevertheless, neither priesthood nor medicine could assuage her torment, and it would be several more hours before sheer exhaustion from the strain of endurance overtook her and she fell mercifully asleep.

But it was only the beginning.

Landing

I was not going to graduate.

I was nearing the end of my final semester at BYU, approximately fourteen or fifteen months after the twins' births. Predicate Logic. It was predicate logic that was finally going to close the lid on my academic coffin. I had been able to skate by in my other classes: a B in a relatively easy Marriage and Family course, a C in a more difficult philosophy class, even a D+ in Personal Finance, which I almost never attended—I probably should have failed that course outright. But Predicate Logic was a required course for my chosen major, philosophy, and you couldn't get anything lower than a C for a major class. Once you dropped below a C you would have to retake the class. I was well below a C, and scheduled to graduate the following month. If I didn't produce that C, I would not graduate.

That I even had a 3.0 GPA by the time of my final semester was nothing short of miraculous. I had a full load of classes at BYU, but I also worked a full-time job in Midvale, about forty-five minutes away. I would attend my classes in the morning (scheduling the first for the earliest time slot available) and by late morning be on the road to my job. I would arrive home every day around 7:00 or 7:30 P.M. I could either do homework at that time or arise extra early in the morning. Either of these options proved to be essentially impossible from the moment we brought the twins home, dragging along a host of medical complications with them.

The problem (and all other problems associated with their entrance into the world—of which there were many—paled in comparison) was the babies' sleep patterns. Or rather, their complete

lack of any kind of sleep pattern. One of them was almost always awake. Neither slept for more than forty minutes at a time. Try as we did (and oh how we tried!) we could not harmonize one with the other. We attempted everything in the book, read other books, sought advice from doctors, and then wrote our own book to replace the old, clearly flawed books, and that book was a failure as well. We would eventually discover some wheat and dairy allergies; Amanda spent some weeks tinkering with her diet until she at last found one compatible with nursing (she was determined—driven by an unseen force, she would later say—to exclusively breastfeed them at all costs) but this only slightly improved the situation.

I recall that one day/night, Ethan stayed awake (with intermittent short, fitful naps) for almost twenty hours straight. I barely remember placing him in his bouncy seat to play with some toys. It was around three A.M. I sat down on a kitchen chair and immediately nodded off. Amanda had gone to bed thirty minutes before with Mylyn, who had finally fallen asleep. I was awakened minutes later by Ethan's sudden screaming; the poor little guy had also nodded off and hit his mouth on a plastic protrusion on his seat. Amanda came running out from the bedroom, anxiously asking what had happened. My explanation angered her and we were now hysterically screaming at each other. Our nerves were shot, every physical and emotional reserve totally depleted.

The first six months we got at most an hour of sleep every night. Survival only came because it was so consistent: the body will eventually adapt to extreme situations, given enough repetition. By their first birthday, that had gradually improved to ninety minutes. By their second birthday we could plan on about four to five hours every night. I would try to spell Amanda on weekends when I was around so she could get a nap, but it wouldn't last long. When both babies cried and I couldn't console them, she would inevitably get up to help.

Amanda's mother had come to help for a couple of days at the very beginning. But she and her family had recently moved to Idaho, and she still had young children to care for herself (Amanda was the second-oldest of several). Besides, things were . . . complicated with her. She would not be available to assist us. My own

mother offered to fly out from Indiana to help. But there were issues on that front as well and Amanda felt at the time that it would be better if she didn't come. My parents' feelings were naturally hurt, and communication between us dried to a trickle. Neither of us had any other family nearby. As for our ward—we lived in one of those “newlywed or nearly dead” wards. The “nearly dead” Relief Society president had sisters in the ward deliver two meals, and that was that. Looking back, I see that I should have been more assertive in asking for help and pleading our cause. But as it was, no one wanted to hear about the hardships; they only wanted the stories that made having twins as romantic and adorable as they imagined it should be. And besides, do you know Sister Jones? She had *two* sets of twins, and then two more children besides. Now *that's* tough.

Our home had become a prison cell, one whose walls closed in around us a little more each day. We rarely went anywhere with the babies. Even after the danger of contracting RSV (respiratory syncytial virus, particularly prevalent in winter) had dissipated with the coming of spring, it was mind-numbingly exhausting to go anywhere with them because they would never stop crying. I dimly recall walking the paths of campus one day, feeling as though I were surrounded by ghosts, pale, wispy imitations of immaterial beings who could not help me, could not even hear my cries. They weren't real. But that's why I liked them, why I craved their spectral, wraithlike presence. Because the only thing that was real—devastatingly real—was the hellish nightmare living inside my apartment, a nightmare that I sentenced my wife to every day while I feverishly escaped every morning out the front door. Sure, I would dive in when I returned home and we staggered through the nights side by side. But I knew that the vast majority of the burden of their care fell on her. And the guilt would eat me alive that I was leaving her behind each morning, guilt at the relief that would wash over me as the howling of the babies and her piercing silence faded into the distance. I sometimes sobbed to myself in the car as I drove away, “I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry.” But I never turned around.

Oh, so many things to have done differently in hindsight! Take a semester off. Insist at gunpoint that a parent or two take up residence in our apartment, relational issues be damned. Switch to

bottles. Tell my professors I was suicidal and take incompletes in my classes. There's a funny thing about hindsight, though. By definition it only appears after—usually long after—the events it claims to be able to see so clearly. And it is not 20/20; far from it. Hindsight is completely reconstructive, more a way of protecting oneself from the horrors of the past than a way of seeing it truly. I remember my brain turning to mush, not being able to type a coherent sentence for the first time in my life, forgetting co-workers' names, nearly driving into bridge pylons on the highway multiple times. No, those commonsense things simply would never have happened, not in this universe or any other one. We were kids having kids, unaided and scared, groping for the light, making it up as we went along.

I realized, distantly, at one point, that I had landed. I had reached some kind of bottom, some kind of ground floor, though in the hazy back of my mind, there was a voice telling me that all lowest points are only deceptively temporary; there is always further to fall, another low to collapse into. I marveled that my initial fall, so brutal and sudden, had become a gradual, seemingly never-ending descent, a descent so deep that I could no longer see the top, and one so gradual it hadn't occurred to me that I was still falling. And then the landing, with this realization, a realization I had had long before but had not allowed full access to my mind: There would be no one to rescue us, to even give us a brief reprieve, no one even to say that things would get better.

We were utterly alone.

Reckoning

At some point, stumbling around in the darkness, I had stopped even attempting to do homework. Some of my classes didn't make attendance part of the final grade; I stopped attending these classes altogether. I initially told some of my professors about our plight but received no quarter. My logic professor responded curtly, "Huh. My son and his wife had triplets." Despite the round-the-clock assistance his son's family was receiving from his extended family and his ward, having triplets was apparently much harder under any circumstances, so I had nothing to complain about.

I didn't care about anything. On some days I would come

home half hoping to hear Amanda had had an affair so I could exit from the misery that was our marriage. I might have considered one myself if I even had the energy to desire one. As if any woman could have even slightly desired my company! I knew that the abhorrence of life I had begun to carry around with me showed perfectly on my face. I couldn't have been less attractive or appealing and I'm sure, now, that no one wanted to be around me. Amanda and I spoke to each other but rarely conversed (I discovered there was a big difference between speaking and conversing). We fought over everything. Both of us had become precision experts in tactically locating the other's weak spots and mercilessly hacking one another to bits. We hated each other. I despised other people, who I was sure had never experienced anything close to what we were going through. I hated life. When I wasn't hoping something or someone besides myself would end my marriage, I was hoping the babies would just die. They were the source of all this horrendous suffering. If they weren't going to improve it would be better for them to just pass on to their celestial state. To make matters worse for me, Amanda didn't appear to feel that way about them. She would occasionally become frustrated with them but only rarely directed her negative thoughts and feelings toward them. Despite her suffering, she found that motherhood was genuinely fulfilling. Ironically, what was killing her was also providing her with the will to go on. I detested her for this. That she could love them—not that she loved them more than she loved me as much as the fact that she could love the very source of her suffering *when I could not*—drove the wedge deeper between us.

I would find out later that most days she would cry all day until about an hour before I returned home. We didn't know it at the time, but her postpartum depression was truly severe. It was winter, and with the additional threat of RSV striking the twins, she almost never left the house. Later she told me that on some days she would stand, wearing nothing but her garments, in the frame of the open front door, a baby in each arm, staring off into nothing. Sometimes people would pass by but she wouldn't notice until they had moved past her. She would spend hours doing this.

Her pain was surely greater than mine. At least I would get an almost daily break from the hell residing in our home and have ac-

tual conversations with adults. Amanda was trapped, both in the physical confines of our small apartment and in the prison of her own mind. She was often completely unresponsive to me, making our fights sometimes strangely welcome. I knew she was suffering more than I. But I was such a small, pathetic man that knowing this made things worse for me, and embittered me toward her. I never felt like I could say I had a hard day; her day was inevitably harder. I never felt like I could complain and rant and rave; she rarely complained. I wanted to suffer the most, to be the one that should be most pitied. I didn't have any reserves left to help her, to go to work, to be a student; didn't that count for something on the suffering scale?

My job was barely providing for the necessities of life and it wasn't enough. I was probably going to fail my logic class, so I wouldn't graduate this year, my primary responsibility unfilled. And what would I be graduating in? Philosophy. *Philosophy*. Of all the worthless majors to concentrate on, I had chosen that one. Sure, I had had a "plan." I was going to *graduate school*. I wanted to *teach*. What a joke. Even if I miraculously passed this class, my middling GPA virtually guaranteed that no graduate school would ever accept me. Two months previously, I had written a trial letter of intent, seeing if I could adequately explain to a graduate program why my GPA was so low and how that shouldn't be an obstacle in considering me for their program. Strangely, I just couldn't find the right phrasing for explaining how I chose to help my wife with our twins instead of doing homework and concentrating on the studies that would prepare me for graduate school. That dream had died.

And I didn't feel like a father at all. Many days I felt like (what I imagined would be) a partial and failed mother. At work and school all day, not making enough money, studying for exams to get a degree that was almost totally resistant to employment, and one I was not certain I would even be able to obtain anyway. Up all night caring for children that didn't seem to ever respond to my care. Was I a human being anymore? Was I even a man? Whatever I was, it was a shell of what I had once been. I was in limbo, suspended painfully in midair between the unattainable religious and cultural ideals of fatherhood and manhood and the brute ne-

cessity of physical need that was slowly killing me. My world had become utterly meaningless.

On one particular evening, as I rounded the point of the mountain on I-15 on my way home from work, I dozed off. I came to violently seconds later, realizing I had drifted into the lane next to mine, on my right. Fortunately, that lane was momentarily empty of vehicles and I quickly turned back to the left to reenter my lane, greeted by not a few honking cars. That was it. This was probably the seventh or eighth time I had dozed off on I-15 and I was going to get myself killed. I pulled over at the Thanksgiving Point exit and parked my truck on the side of the road, determined to grab a fifteen-minute catnap. But adrenaline was still coursing through my veins and I couldn't sleep. I gazed out at the cars whizzing by on the freeway in the fading light and shook my head, smiling a mirthless smile. It was hopeless. No really, it was, I thought. I was not being melodramatic. The lack of sleep was making me catatonic. I was in constant pain from head to toe and almost always wanted to cry. I had never experienced depression before and now wondered if this was what it felt like.

In the midst of all this, the Question finally overwhelmed me. I had resisted it in the Gethsemane of that birthing room, the day the twins were born and the day it seemed no divine or earthly mercy would be extended to my wife in her agony. The Question had appeared on my doorstep each day since then, and each day I ignored it and went resolutely about my suffering. With the slow passage of time, it grew larger in my field of vision, until it was everywhere I looked, constantly on the periphery of my gaze, always unflaggingly present. And now, with no strength left, I could not resist anymore, and one day it came in and calmly and silently sat down and took up residence in my heart. In the silence of my commute between Provo and Salt Lake, I began to seriously question my religious beliefs.

However, I fairly quickly (and surprisingly) came to realize that any sort of genuine acceptance of atheism was out of the question for me, not because it was ridiculous or misguided, but because I was ensnared and held captive by my religious world. Atheism wasn't an option because, as a concept, it was too easy—easy to the point of impossibility. I could happily conceptually assent to it, but only superficially. It wasn't that belief was

more rationally defensible and non-belief was weak and faulty. Far from it. In fact, the seductive lure of a verificationist logic that demanded empirically obvious evidence for every meaningful belief (and therefore did not admit belief in God) was incredibly enticing. You see, converting from a religious worldview to an atheistic one is, in the long view, a fairly judicious and reasonable move, one that potentially solves a lot of cognitive dissonance, if it's even possible for you at all. Though I could not do it myself, I discovered that for those who could, such a conversion could be quite freeing. Such a conversion will usually require one to alter and re-align one's entire view of cosmology—of the place of the world and human beings within existence. Everything changes, yes—but everything changes *together*, simultaneously, in a kind of godless harmony. The fragments of a broken world realign (perhaps over time) to form a different, yet even more logically feasible world, one that appears to be newly cohesive and coherent, and one that everyone, religious and non-religious alike, can see the sensibleness of, even if they cannot embrace it themselves. As religious people, we don't normally give the atheist worldview a whole lot of credence. But that's not because the religious worldview is so overwhelmingly rationally superior, and atheism is irrational and pathetic. It is because our religion has seized us, called to us in such a way that we cannot ignore it. It has captured our minds and our hearts with little effort on our part. There's a little free will wriggling around in there; but not much. And it only exerts itself within that specific context. You are religious (and, more specifically, Christian, or Hindu, or Mormon) more because of the pious threads of religious life that created you, or the religious event or events that interrupted and broke open your previous world, and now give new meaning to the world it has created in its place. It's shocking to the community of the former believer, of course, that think that is worse than murder—to turn your back on religion and God. But the move itself is perfectly rational, if rationality is ultimately non-contradiction, and non-contradiction is all the pieces of the observable world fitting together somehow. How could that not be liberating?

Instead, I found that ten-thousand threads bound me to an existence that I never primordially chose for myself, and thus was a

way of being that on a fundamental level I could not merely discard. I discovered this when I willfully and consciously began telling myself that God (at least the God of my understanding) did not exist. This is a classic response to the problem of evil: when the suffering gets intense and prolonged enough you'll eventually see that God (who is supposedly the God of intervention and deliverance) will not deliver you, just as he has not delivered millions upon millions from slow agonizing death, lives that endured far more than you, and then were snuffed out of existence. Once you realize this, you'll stop believing. Unrelenting suffering is the funeral dirge of any so-called god.

Good. Bring it on. What a welcome relief that will be.

But no.

I could not make myself disbelieve. I could not do it, no matter how I willed it. Which wasn't to say that many preconceptions and particularized beliefs were not ground into dust. I was more confused than ever about the nature of God, His presence in my life, and how to reconcile my unrelentingly painful experience with what I had been taught about Him. But I could not make myself believe He didn't exist, or that His presence had not been more obvious and tangible during prior moments of my life. Now, there was an error in the program, a tear in the painting, but the painting was not replaced by a different painting, one that could be equally beautiful and understood, one with no major flaws. It just sat there in front of me, unmoving and glaringly, even gaudily (godily?), ragged and imperfect. Over and over again I wished there weren't a God. My desire for God to not exist was ironically intense and earnest enough to amount to being a prayer, a prayer that my prayers would be received by nothingness. Better to know that I was on my own than to know He was there and supposedly loved me, but that I was nevertheless alone in His presence. The loneliness of solitude under the gaze of an omni-benevolent and omnipotent God, a God who was everywhere at all times, was infinitely worse than the loneliness shared with an equally lonely universe. That kind of realization, to my broken mind, was truly, even absurdly, tragic. The seemingly easy way out would not be an option. I would have no choice but to somberly reckon with the religious world and the religious peoples who had made me what I

was. There was nowhere else to look but up—to an invisible, silent, ever-present God, gazing wordlessly down upon me.

Ascent

In the end, time—which had colluded with the physical world to slowly march us toward death—also eventually served as an invaluable ally, and we gradually emerged from the grave. There was no dramatic rescue, no earth-shattering event on an epic scale. A series of small, grace-filled events helped keep us afloat. We were blessed to eventually move into a much larger and newer apartment. My logic professor unexpectedly, and at the last moment, changed the format of the class final to a written essay (which I easily produced) instead of a series of symbolic logic proofs (which I would have failed). After many months, the twins eventually graduated from their heart monitors and oxygen lines and we began to take them out of the apartment, first on walks, then to restaurants and malls. Gradually, we began to sleep again. Though it seemed an eternity at the time, the agonizingly slow but steady return to semi-functionality (of which I've related only the hundredth part) had lasted about two years.

But we weren't the same. Physically and emotionally, parts of us had died; indeed, had died many deaths, as new selves grappled with our world, selves created from bodies and minds that could no longer endure except in remnants, or bits and pieces of our former selves, the ethereal, barely-there remains of the corpses we had become. Those remnants would become new bodies and new minds, with new thoughts and new ways of struggling to live. And they would eventually deteriorate into remnants themselves, and the painful birthing process would begin anew. We died and were re-born multiple times, in that we lived processes that made us different, processes that forced on us new ways of thinking and being. As we gradually ascended out of the grave, our new selves could no longer know the selves that had died, in the prophet Jacob's words, "pierced with deep wounds." I look back at prior versions of myself with the eyes of a foreigner, an alien, barely recognizing those incarnations.

And yet it was difficult to tell where death had ravaged us and where rebirth into what we became replaced it. They seemed one and the same process, one and the same event. Our new selves felt

stronger but aged. We felt old beyond our years. For a long time we could only look at the people and the world around us with grave solemnity. We had arisen out of a private holocaust. Everything was new, without a history, because we, in the new remnants of our old selves, preceded everything around us. We saw the world with new eyes, eyes not fettered to old ways of seeing and understanding. Resurrected, we could live again in new ways.

It was some time before I could talk about God again, or really anything related to religion. Doctrine and Covenants 122 had once been my favorite scriptural narrative—a dialogue between Christ and Joseph Smith, leader of God’s chosen people, suffering unremittingly in the bare existence of Liberty Jail, crying out to God—where was He hiding while His people suffered and died? And God’s response: if even Hell itself threatens to swallow you whole in its rage and pain, “all these things shall give thee experience and shall be for thy good” (v. 7). I would quote this scripture frequently (often, I’m sure, quite insufferably) to members of the church I encountered on my mission, who were struggling with various trials. Now, I no longer knew what to think of it. Perhaps God was not all-powerful. Or maybe God’s power, His omnipotence, was of a different sort than physical, interventionist power. I thought I could accept that power within a religious context might be qualitatively different than power in the contexts with which I was more familiar. But a God who would not speak to me in the midst of my worst moments? How was that possible? In this way, the Question remained with me even after I had accepted that I could not (and, in fact, ultimately did not want to) rid myself of the core elements of my religious self. God had become a stranger to me, and yet, because I now had to reckon and wrestle with God as I never had to before, in a way He had become more real than at any prior time in my life. He was much more present to me than at those times that I recalled being in some kind of prayerful communication with Him and so certain of his existence that his omnipresence ironically showed Him to be nowhere at all. But this realization was of no immediate help. I could not see how to reconcile myself to this kind of God. Everything had been stripped away and the bare fact of God’s presence (silent and immovable) was all that was left. What was I to do with this?

The answer did not come for some time. In the meantime, I

continued to attend church—by force of will and reluctance to accept the social and marital consequences of inactivity—eventually holding callings and even bearing a testimony once or twice. But it was not because I felt some kind of prompting or yearning; I was curious about the possibility of my new self being able to carry on the practices of my old, dead self. A testimony was to be had in the bearing of it, right? But I did not feel anything—no spiritual confirmation, no witness of truth, no gift of comfort. I supposed, then, I had failed my test of faith, and this was the natural consequence.

More time passed. The twins grew older and a second daughter was added to our family. Another series of miracles and improbabilities (sure, why not? God existed—He just didn't think enough of me to talk to me, and therefore all miracles and horrible tragedies were both totally mysterious and seemingly arbitrary and capricious), and I was in graduate school to study (of course!) religion. Tormented by my experiences, frustrated with unsatisfactory conclusions, haunted by the silent God who incongruously would not leave me alone, I ironically sought refuge in a place where I would have to talk about, write about, and constantly think about God in some way or other. On Sundays I could then be extra-unsatisfied with the way my fellow Saints spoke about and lived their religion. Uneasily, I would note that many of my professors were the same as I. Most of them were atheists, but they were "Christ-haunted"; they had (also with deep irony) devoted their godless lives to thinking about God all the time. In a way God was as much a presence in their lives as He was in mine, and in much the same way. Perhaps, then, I was an atheist after all. Of course, there were many other factors that also constituted my desire to become a teacher, but I was also going to figure this out, however long it took. I was under no illusion that simply "thinking" my way into a solution was possible or would even be sufficient if I could, but I had to find some way of explaining a phenomenon to myself that no other human being could apparently account for to my satisfaction.

For years I thought about, wrote about, took classes on, and talked about the problem of evil and suffering. But everything I brought to bear on the subject felt inadequate, even a betrayal of

those who suffered greatly, because it offered reasons instead of comfort and mercy.

Then one day, in a moment of astounding simplicity, I reread Matthew 27:46, traditionally known in Christian history as the “Word of Abandonment”:

Around the ninth hour, Jesus shouted in a loud voice, saying “Eli Eli lama sabachthani?” which is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

This was the Psalmist’s cry in Psalm 22. This was Joseph Smith’s cry in Liberty Jail. Only Joseph had received an answer. Jesus, here on the cross, in the midst of ultimate suffering, in answer to his cry, received—silence.

I had no immediate response to this. Christ himself was greeted by silence in his most desperate hour. Did this complicate things even more? Perhaps. But I realized that this howl of lamentation, this crying out for the hidden God, was not the question of an atheist. It was the question of a believer, one who cannot help but believe, but whose belief offers no comfort, no revelation, no answers of solid certainty.

This experience remained with me for a while. Again, no easy answers here, but that was actually a sign of hope. I was sick of easy answers that avoided hard questions by appealing to happy endings. We do not live the ending. We are always living the middle. I needed something that would wrench me right down the middle. I had been through something hard, something soul-destroying. Surely any kind of light shed on my experience would not merely reveal that I simply hadn’t prayed hard enough, or had enough faith, or misunderstood prophetic teachings, or didn’t do enough to serve others, as if God were looking for any excuse He could to cut himself off from me. If there were answers, they would need to penetrate my bones and tear open my soul in order to reach me.

Gradually, without fanfare, I also began to realize that communication with me might not be what God was after, if God was after anything. And perhaps, in any case, it wasn’t what I really had needed. The more I thought about it, the more I began to suspect that revelation as word—as words—would never have reached me. Was God (or anyone else for that matter) going to say something to me that I couldn’t already find in scripture, something

that would surpass Liberty Jail and Job and Isaiah? I would never have listened, in any case. Instead, perhaps what was really happening was, on some level, not communication but communion.¹

I could not rid myself of God's presence but perhaps his constant presence was reducible to essentially this: that there could be no words God could have given me, no explanations for my suffering, no reasons why He could or could not intervene, *even if there were in reality such reasons*. I cannot know with certainty that there were not reasons on some level, though I strongly believed that nothing could explain it all away. But to provide me with them, even if they existed, would have been to betray my suffering by justifying it. There is unspeakable suffering that simply *cannot* be justified with reasons—it is unspeakable. I do not want to compare my suffering with the suffering of so many others, but for me it could not be spoken. It could be neither painted nor sung. It could not be brought down on engraved tablets from a mountain. Nevertheless, perhaps it could be communed with. What, I asked myself, was God actually *doing* as I was suffering? What was God doing while so many of His children moaned and wept under the weight of their burdens? What was He doing while his beloved son cried out for confirmation that He had not been abandoned? Communion comes from the Greek, *koinonia*, and it means “fellowship” or “intimate participation.” For the first time I felt that whatever else was happening, whatever reasons existed, whatever laws were being followed of which I was ignorant, God was in communion with me in my suffering, my fellow-sufferer, the one whom Enoch saw would weep over His children, but did not, could not, hide His eyes from them. At last, something of what I can only say was the Holy Spirit finally penetrated me—I had come to know that God was there, silently and immovably there. But now I felt He was also weeping.

Years later I would publish a paper² concerning that most problematic of Mormon scriptures regarding the problem of evil and suffering, Alma 14. In that paper I wrote the following, an incomplete, certainly revisable, culmination of what I had learned in my own experiences:

The religious life cannot be a comfort to us. We think that spiritual comfort or strength is the primary benefit of lived religion but that's

because we continue to bind belief in God to the causes and origins of our sufferings. The call from scripture to repent, to constantly revise yourself in your perpetual brokenness, to reconsider your world, and to reach outward to others as they also call to us is better defined as exhausting, disorienting, and sometimes disheartening. No, religion is anything but comforting and our genuine encounters with God are often painfully transformative. It is radical indeed to consider a relationship to God that is not comforting and reassuring. But there is still comfort to be had. In Mormonism *comfort is a divine mandate* (Mosiah 18) but not as comfort derived from God: we are to mourn with those that mourn, comfort those who stand in need of comfort. And others can and do comfort us, most often in silence, and in ways that have nothing to do with explanations. In the Mormon theological perspective we participate in mourning that did not originate in ourselves, the suffering of which did not originate in ourselves. . . .

The very fact of presence is comforting, even, and maybe especially, in silence. That Alma had a constant companion in his suffering, and in the witnessing of ultimate suffering, is perhaps symbolic of the significance of this truth. Together we suffer, though there are no explanations, nothing that can satisfy our intellect. Even on the cross, even after God Himself withdrew His presence and Christ cries out that he had been forsaken by God, we usually say that he was lonelier than he had ever been. But is that true? At the foot of the cross stood the women he had been closest to in life. On either side of him, fellow mortals, also nailed to trees, sharing the form of his death. None of these could provide explanations to him, and of course perhaps he needed none. In any case, there were none to provide comforting explanations to the women at the cross nor to his fellow sufferers. That they were together, that they would not leave him, was all there was. God withdraws from the scene altogether, and what is left? The mourners and the comforters, to whatever extent possible. Not that God is simply unable to provide reasons. But if He truly suffers with us, what value can these reasons possibly have? Can they turn genuine suffering into non-suffering? No, this seems putatively impossible. If God suffers with us, not just physically but emotionally or psychologically, including the suffering of the absurd and the meaningless, then reasons will not save us. The only thing that will save us, perhaps, is first—to discern that there are always those, worlds without end, who need us to mourn for them—the

task to which we devote ourselves in the presence of the suffering of others. Second, to have available to us at least the possibility to realize that at least one remains with us, noticeable even in absence, the only one whose presence or absence, for all of us, believer and non-believer alike, is always manifest, always unmistakably apparent for each one of us, the one who eternally remains, even if in silence.

Indeed, Simone Weil likewise asserts, “We must only wait and call out. Not call upon someone, while we still do not know if there is anyone; but cry out that we are hungry and want some bread.”³ Job’s friends initially heard his cry of lamentation, and knew that mourning was the only appropriate response:

And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven.

So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great (Job 2:12–13).

We learn, each of us, as if we are an Adam or an Eve, for the first time, what God is. No philosophy or theology can explain it. Scripture only vaguely alludes to it, as the records of people who themselves were revealed as if for the first time. There are no answers that apply to every situation. More broadly speaking, however, suffering presents a task to be accomplished. That task is the task of lifting and mourning. If my experiences gave me anything, they really only gave me this: a well of empathy and love on which to draw and offer others in their own brokenness and weary despair, a willing (if still imperfect) haven for the downtrodden. As Henry James so eloquently put it, “We help each other—even unconsciously, each in our own effort, we lighten the effort of others, we contribute to the sum of success, make it possible for others to live.”⁴

My religion is no longer a religion of scripture-quoting or prayer-offering on others’ behalf, though I will do both if they wish me to. My personal religion is no longer a religion of preaching a testimony of propositional certainty about particular doctrines. Instead, my religion is to be a person who can be approached by those in tears, near total collapse. It is to be someone

who is ready and able to lift up hands that hang down, and weep and mourn in silent communion over that which cannot be spoken. I believe that this, in the end, for those of us who live in the interminable, everlasting presence of God, is the glorious task for which we are born and re-born.

Notes

1. See Michael Rea, "Divine Hiddenness, Divine Silence," in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology, 6th Edition*, edited by Louis Pokman and Michael Rea (Wadsworth/Cengage, 2011), 266–75.
2. "Theologizing in the Presence of Burning Children: From Theodicy to Lament," *Sunstone* (September 2012, no. 168): 44–49.
3. Simone Weil, *Gravity and Grace*, translated by Emma Craufurd (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952), 102.
4. Henry James, *Selected Letters of Henry James*, edited by Leon Adel (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 201.



Brian Christensen
Double Split, steel/stainless steel
75"x 42"x 15"



Brian Christensen
Dozer, steel,
68" x 62" x 56"

POETRY

A Short Poem about Nearly Everything

R. A. Christmas

for Bill Bryson and the Hayes family

On his morning walk on Deer Flat Road in Kuna, Idaho,
a man came upon a chalk drawing of our
solar system—more or less to scale.

Pluto first, then Neptune, etc., as he walked half a block
toward Earth—assuming Earth to be about the
size of the period at the end of this line.

It was a colorful attempt to illustrate the vastness of our
tiny place in the universe—the impossibility of
imagining it from textbook diagrams.

The family he was visiting had a dwarf daughter, born
after her mom decided not to get her tubes tied.
The dad was an army helicopter pilot.

They'd adopted an Iraqi family with three dwarf kids
needing medical care, brought them to Idaho,
and rented them the house next door.

The pilot paid the bills; kids played back and forth.
When the Iraqis' dwarf daughter died after
critical neck surgery, the pilot's wife

took the mother each week to the cemetery to recite
the Qur'an over the grave. She sent meals;
so did they; she mowed their lawn;

which shows, on this pint-sized planet—like that map
of our solar system scrawled on a sidewalk—
the importance of a giant perspective.

Graphene

Clifton Holt Jolley

Between the eye and what the eye sees is seeing.
 The light that knots believers to God is the slenderest thread.
 To kiss is not a kiss, as easily blown to one's beloved on a breath
 as put upon a mouth, a forehead, a hand, a breast, and ever
 without a measurable mark, a remnant to be weighed. None are
 counted by that counting that measures least to be Graphene
 (or rewarded, as the case may be). Perhaps it's simply what
 doesn't stick. Graphene would not have been refined into this
 thinnest wonder were it not for methodology: tape on tape
 transferring the shadow of it, stronger than the shade
 of trees or buildings or anything made of not-Graphene.

But without a Cossack to make more of it,
 to find a sticky stuff to shred the wind,
 the light, the water to which ships go down
 and elemental that bends us to the eternal
 flux of one into another, who can know
 how much more likely to plumb and set
 upright the world is what we have not yet
 refined: transparent, so we cannot see.

Graphene is the thinnest, strongest thing (if you believe
 the recent progeny of science), a Philosopher's Stone
 and alchemy of magicians less likely than Newton
 or da Vinci or the Greeks. A single atom deep,
 deeper than previous physicists could reach,
 imagination Scotch Taped by improbable geeks,
 the fin of a serpent of a sea so much increased
 the ancients named it "Deep" and warned us
 by charts (after anyone had other use of them
 to go to sea in ships or wonder at the edges
 of the world): "Beyond here there be serpents."

Serpents are the stuff of the unseen:
Christ and Lucifer, both of whom we keen.
When Moses lifted up his staff to part the sea,
the miracle was what might have been, war
and victory or defeat the intention of a serpent.
“Beyond here there be dragons,” which have wings,
whose gift is not treasure or to fly or to define
the limit of things, but the mystery of having seen.

Even if you could find wetter water into
which to cast and deeper seas, Graphene
is a net too unlikely to catch fish or squid,
neither copper nor iron nor true alchemy,
but our most recent most thing: most strong,
most thin, most least, making of it mostly
air, as is the most of all of us, the empty
in-between that makes us most like everything.

Inaccuracy

Justin Evans

Though I know it to be impossible
I always remember winter having

a stronger hold on the mountain
than summer

the pale white of snow
fading into the white of

cloud and mist, the entire world
losing itself in the void

Hobble Creek Almanac

Justin Evans

Growing up every child learned the story, how horses
stole themselves away like thieves in the night
down to the cool waters to drink, shrug off
the day's work, which had gathered, swollen
their now hobbled ankles; how settlers woke,
learned their animals had found escape,
iron shackles left in the anemic stream,
naming by baptism the small creek and town.

We all learned what's in a name, how identity
comes along for the ride, can saddle a family
for generations; how a name can elicit a stare,
put a child at the same desk an older sister occupied,
or a cousin, or a parent before that; how the past
can never be erased by what takes place day to day.

Sixth-Grade Broadway Revue

Jim Richards

Reb Tevye is in the shower singing
 “If I Were a Rich Man.” He’s eleven,
 my son, and suddenly in love
 with Broadway music because Mrs. Hale,
 whom he affectionately calls
The Bomb, has inspired him. This little football player

singing “Bless Your Beautiful Hide”
 is shorter than every girl in his choir class. He can’t hit
 either *O* in “Oklahoma,”
 but this doesn’t stop him from belting as he sits
 at the kitchen table doing his math.
I get to wear a wig, he says one day after school,

and a dress when we sing
 “Standing on the Corner Watching All the Girls.”
 He himself seems surprised
 by his enthusiasm. One night he showers
 too long, singing
 “I Believe” from *The Book of Mormon* over and

over. He comes out
 warm and wet, clean as a rinsed white rose, a towel
 crunched in one hand to keep it
 around his waist, his bare chest a lit lamp. *Dad*, he says,
we learned a song in school
about Mormons. I knew this was coming. *It tells about*

some stuff we believe. I've heard it,
I say. It's supposed to be funny. He doesn't believe me,
is sure it's sincere, is excited
that he and his friends are singing together about
what makes him
different. People will laugh, I say, when you sing it

at the concert. *Why?*
he asks, smiling, incredulous. I try to explain, but he
doesn't believe. When the night
of the concert arrives, the flame of his excitement
for *Wicked*, *The Sound*
of *Music*, has suffocated. His face is dim, looks

as though he wants to rush
through each song. There is no pleasure in it anymore.
His movements are like
a kid waiting in line at the grocery store.
When the medley
finally morphs into "I Believe," it's clear that this

is the test he's been waiting for.
His light returns, his face beams with sincerity as he belts,
A Mormon just believes!
his mouth in a tight, high-note smile, his eyelids clenched,
his freckled forehead moist,
his arms slowly rising from his sides, when the laughter

begins. His eyes shift. He can't believe it.
He sings louder and more earnestly, his face reddening,
the laughter growing stronger,
his whole body ringing against the roars as if one voice
sing-screaming *believe, believe,*
could save him from the truth, and them, and all of us.

Janie Goodmansen's Reply*

Jim Richards

Jim asked me, encouraged me, even begged me
 not to do it. *You're surrounded by seedy lies*,
 he said, *don't sew them into your breasts*. Did he worry
 it would reflect badly on him? I don't know,
 I couldn't ask, and he couldn't understand. His breasts
 were bigger than mine. (He hates it when I say that.)
 People think it's D-cup ambition: "Boobs or Bust!"
 But that's not it. As a teacher, I know how close D is to F.
 And I knew what it would cost. I had nothing.
You're not flat, he said, *just small, and small is cute*.
 After all the nursing—my offerings seemed so sad—
 I couldn't even fill an A. I only wanted to redeem the goods
 God gave me, with a little interest, "mine own with usury."
 I bought swimsuit after swimsuit every spring
 and sent them back. I took a knife and cut the foam cups
 from one and doubled them in what I wore.
 But that's not it. I was missing the virtues that soften,
 that warm. I know, it could've been worse. *Look around you*,
 he said, often. *Which body would you trade for yours?*
 That's not it. I wanted to trade what my teen feels when I hug him
 for comfort. I wanted half the generosity my sister had
 surgery to reduce. I wanted a lower grade, B instead of A.
 Nothing that stood out because it was absent
 or because it was present. I wanted love to pillow the cares
 of those I love. Not a sternum. Not a heart of stone.

*A response to Darlene Young's "Angels of Mercy," first published in *Segullah*, May 2007, and reprinted in *Fire in the Pasture: 21st Century Mormon Poets*.

Fern Hill Revisited

Jonathon Penny

Time held me green and dying, though I sang,
And spun me off the whinnied fields and out of praise
In his big harvest hands 'til horse and hen and place
Were only memory, then myth, then vacant space
Implacable as Time's own clockwork face.
And my worn trap-spring sprang,

And I, Time's time-mocked minion,
Found Death had no dominion after all,
And all was Eden, more than Eden—
A Heaven pastoral, as earthy as that dell,
As chatty as those ricks, borne as the very farm
Grown green and golden about Fern Hill.

“Epithalamion” by Gerard Manley Hopkins

Jonathon Penny

Originally published as a fragment in Robert Bridges’ 1918 collection of Hopkins’ work, here “Epithalamion” gets a little help from Jonathon Penny (in italics). First published at Wilderness Interface Zone on Feb 14, 2012. <http://wilderness.motleyvision.org/2012/epithalamion-by-gerard-manley-hopkins/>

HARK, hearer, hear what I do; lend a thought now, make believe
 We are leafwhelmed somewhere with the hood
 Of some branchy bunchy bushybowered wood,
 Southern dene or Lancashire clough or Devon cleave,
 That leans along the loins of hills, where a candycoloured, where
 a gluegold-brown
 Marbled river, boisterously beautiful, between
 Roots and rocks is danced and dandled, all in froth and
 waterblowballs, down.
 We are there, when we hear a shout
 That the hanging honeysuck, the dogeared hazels in the cover
 Makes dither, makes hover
 And the riot of a rout
 Of, it must be, boys from the town
 Bathing: it is summer’s sovereign good.

By there comes a listless stranger: beckoned by the noise
 He drops towards the river: unseen
 Sees the bevy of them, how the boys
 With dare and with dowlphinry and bellbright bodies
 huddling out,
 Are earthworld, airworld, waterworld thorough hurled, all by
 turn and turn about.

This garland of their gambols flashes in his breast
Into such a sudden zest
Of summertime joys
That he hies to a pool neighbouring; sees it is the best
There; sweetest, freshest, shadowiest;
Fairyland; silk-beech, scrolled ash, packed sycamore, wild
 wychelm, hornbeam fretty overstood
By. Rafts and rafts of flake-leaves light, dealt so, painted on the
 air,
Hang as still as hawk or hawkmoth, as the stars or as the angels
 there,
Like the thing that never knew the earth, never off roots
Rose. Here he feasts: lovely all is! No more: off with—down he
 dings
His bleached both and woolwoven wear:
Careless these in coloured wisp
All lie tumbled-to; then with loop-locks
Forward falling, forehead frowning, lips crisp
Over finger-teasing task, his twiny boots
Fast he opens, last he offwings
Till walk the world he can with bare his feet
And come where lies a coffer, burly all of blocks
Built of chancequarried, selfquained rocks
And the water warbles over into, filleted with glassy grassy
 quicksilvery shivè and shoots
And with heavenfallen freshness down from moorland still
 brims,
Dark or daylight on and on. Here he will then, here he will the
 fleet
Flinty kindcold element let break across his limbs

Long. Where we leave him, froliclavish, while he looks about
him, laughs, swims.

Enough now; since the sacred matter that I mean
I should be wronging longer leaving it to float
Upon this only gambolling and echoing-of-earth note—
What is . . . the delightful dene?

Wedlock. What the water? Spousal love.

*Who the gamboled groom? Kingfish Christ-our-Saviour
Or his son. Who the gangway, brindled, bridling bride to shear the
very sheep of him?*

*Church and churchgoing churchcoming churchliving churchloving
Christkeeping. Who, indeed, the latecome, lightshorn, grinning,
gaming guests?*

We. Us. Poor. Oh!

Father, mother, brothers, sisters, friends
Into fairy trees, wild flowers, wood ferns
Rankèd round the bower *leap! assemble! and withdraw the veiling
world*

*And witness there the sunblonde, brightburned waking
And the wedding of the Word wellspoken, wild, child, grown
Aggrieved, grieved, and greeted
Gastly, good.*



Brian Christensen
Filter, fifty-seventyfive-year-
old ceramics, steel, glass,
72" x 25" x 25"



Brian Christensen
Fruit of Memory, fifty-seventy-
five-year-old ceramics, steel,
55"x 48"x 45"

Sandrine

Levi S. Peterson

These things happened fifty years ago. It was 1962, the year of the World's Fair in Seattle. I was twenty-one and had just finished my junior year at Utah State University in Logan. My forestry advisor there had wrangled me a summer job as an intern with the National Park Service at Mount Rainier. He said I needed to experience the contrast between the dry pine forests of the interior West and the lush fir forests of the Pacific Northwest.

I went home for a few days before leaving—home being a farm in Curlew Valley about fifty miles west of Logan. On the day I headed for the Northwest, my mother said goodbye by taking my hands and making me look directly into her dark, bespectacled eyes. “Remember, Lewis,” she said, “if it comes to having to make a choice, I’d rather you be good than happy.” Being a conscientious Mormon son, I thought about what she had said for a while after I took to the road. I couldn’t imagine a situation where I’d have to make such a choice.

I followed the most direct road between Curlew Valley and Mount Rainier I could find on my Shell Oil road map. I wanted to take in the World's Fair but I figured I could do that later on in the summer. Nothing had prepared me for the spectacle of Mount Rainier. Although it's considered a part of the Cascade Range, it towers over neighboring peaks. Measuring over 14,000 feet, its perpetually snow-covered summit is visible from a hundred miles away.

I was stationed at the primary visitors' center in the park, appropriately called Paradise, which consisted of a big parking lot, a large lodge for tourists, and several smaller dormitories for park staff and for guides belonging to a professional guiding service. I bunked in one of the dormitories with a pleasant high school teacher who spent summers on the seasonal park staff. I quickly

discovered that my duties were far from glorious, consisting mostly of emptying garbage cans, picking up litter, and answering tourist questions. I wasn't unhappy with all that. I was learning a lot about the park and I loved the mountain, especially at dawn and dusk on clear days, when the towering peak burned with a delicate orange alpenglow. That was a sight I never got tired of.

I was on duty six days a week, including Sunday—with an hour and a half off early Sunday morning to attend a small sacrament service for Mormon tourists in the basement of the lodge. My scheduled day off each week was Tuesday. At first, I didn't drive out much on that day, being caught up by exploring the mountain. I visited view points, followed foot trails through the park, and one Tuesday borrowed boots and parka and climbed in the snow to a climber's base camp. But eventually I began to drive off the mountain to explore logging practices on both public and private forest lands—this on the recommendation of my advisor at Utah State.

One Tuesday I ventured up the Carcelle River, a logged-out valley draining out of the northwest corner of the park. In the evening I stopped at a café in Beaufort, a town of about a hundred inhabitants. It was late and the café was empty except for the proprietor, who served me a hot pork sandwich. His name was Maximilian Stewart, Max for short. He was maybe forty-five years old and bald and soft-spoken and he had a hard time looking me in the eyes when he talked. I asked him what he knew about the logging boom along the river during the early twentieth century. He seemed hesitant at first, as if he didn't know much at all about that topic, but pretty soon he opened up and began to talk and I realized I had struck gold.

When I left, I asked him if it would be okay for me to come back on the following Tuesday and he said, sure, he'd be glad to tell me anything he knew about the history of the river. As I got up to leave, his wife came in the front door, and he introduced us and suddenly everything turned topsy-turvy for me. Her name was Sandrine and she was a beauty. There's no other word for it. She was just a beauty—in her early twenties, auburn hair, naturally defined eyebrows, porcelain cheeks.

The problem was I couldn't get her off my mind during the following days, a fact that smacked of a violation of the command-

ment that says thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife. It was so bothersome that I pretty much made up my mind that I wouldn't go back to the café. However, on a routine phone call to my advisor at Utah State, I mentioned Beaufort, and he wanted to know more about the place. I told him it had a post office, a mercantile, a saloon, and of course Max's café. It also had an elementary school to which students were bused from an even smaller town called Limington, which was located on up the river a few miles. "My gad, Lewis," my advisor said over the phone, "do you realize these little derelict logging towns are prime subjects for a study on the sociology of forest-dependent communities. What an opportunity! Don't miss it."

What he was proposing was graduate-level work and I was still an undergrad. But I'd be setting myself up for an exceptional master's thesis a couple of years down the road. I resisted the idea for a few minutes on account of Sandrine, but my advisor wouldn't take no for an answer. As I thought things over, my apprehension began to strike me as just plain silly. I was a Mormon born and bred. I had standards, I recognized boundaries. Admiring Max's wife didn't amount to lusting on her, any more than admiring a beautiful painting amounted to stealing it. So I said okay, and that's how it happened that for the rest of the summer I devoted my day off to a project that I grandiosely entered as "sociological analysis" on my *per diem* requests from the undergraduate research fund at Utah State.

I spent a few Tuesdays creating a population map from county records in Tacoma, which allowed me to document the waxing and waning of Beaufort and Limington. The records also named a couple of sizeable logging camps, Little Quebec and Chambers Landing, that had simply disappeared beneath second-growth trees and brush. After that, my research was basically just a matter of talking to people who lived on the river. I won't say I worked hard at it—it was my day off, after all. Some afternoons I just parked my car, a twelve-year-old Chevrolet, on a Forest Service road and took a nap.

In any event, I made a point of ending my day by having a late supper at the café in Beaufort, where I pumped Max for information. My task became easier as Max became interested in my re-

search project and began asking some of his other customers about things I wanted to know. Naturally, I came to know Sandrine and also their daughter, an eight-year-old named Aubrey, who were usually present. Sandrine kept busy, setting tables or preparing menus for the next day, but she listened to my conversation with Max and sometimes added comments of her own. She had a soft voice and was capable of a radiant smile. But much of the time she seemed tense and preoccupied and prone to answer questions tersely. In contrast, Aubrey was relaxed and cheerful. She had auburn hair, a pug nose, and missing top incisors. She and Max were obviously deeply attached, and she quickly took a shine to me. She liked to sit at the counter and lean against me while I ate my supper or chatted with Max.

Sometimes my conversations with Max got onto personal topics. The fact I was an active Mormon pleased Max. He had worked with a Mormon man in Seattle and liked him. He had the idea that Mormons are extra trustworthy. According to him, that's why a lot of Mormon men were recruited into the FBI and Secret Service. I could believe that easily enough, but to keep things honest I had to tell him that the majority of the felons in the Utah State Penitentiary were Mormons. Max asked if I had been a missionary and when I said no he wanted to know why. It was because I had qualified for a four-year scholarship at Utah State, which I accepted after promising my mother that when I graduated, I would go on a mission.

At any rate, Max decided that I was to be classified among the trustworthy of the world as I learned toward the end of the summer. It was late one Tuesday night after Sandrine had taken Aubrey to their house across the street to put her to bed. As I prepared to leave, Max came from behind the counter and followed me to the door. He said he wanted to ask a favor of me but first he needed to tell me something about Sandrine, which he hoped I would keep a secret.

The secret was she was an ex-junkie whom he had rescued from the alleys of Seattle. The first time he ever saw her, he was on duty at a shipping platform under the viaduct on Elliott Bay. He was old enough, of course, to be her father. He was divorced and his two adult children lived out of state. The shipping platform was a cheerless, noisy place where trucks rumbled in with

produce and hardware, and huffing switch engines positioned freight cars for unloading in front of the platform. Around the corner lived a colony of winos and street dwellers—or at least they slept there in cardboard boxes and sleeping bags. One summer he noticed a new one, Sandrine, who started sitting in the sun at the far edge of the loading dock. After a couple of days Max began to talk to her, and things went from there. She was a wreck, emaciated, listless, and addicted. The child protection agency had put Aubrey into foster care within weeks of her birth. Sandrine didn't know who Aubrey's father was. She told Max it could have been any of a half dozen fellows who traded her a hit for a session down an alley. But dissipation hadn't erased her beauty. Max took her in, cleaned her up, financed her rehab, and married her when she came out. That's when they bought the café in Beaufort. Max wanted Sandrine a long way from downtown Seattle. After a couple of years, the child protection agency turned Aubrey over to them.

As for the favor, Max introduced it in a roundabout way. Before school ended in May, Aubrey's class had gone on a field trip to the World's Fair in Seattle and Sandrine had volunteered to go along as one of the adult chaperones. However, as the time approached, she fell apart—that is, she began having bad dreams at night and bouts of weeping during the day. The upshot of the episode was that Max accompanied Aubrey on the field trip and Sandrine stayed home and kept the restaurant going. "She just couldn't take it, Lewis," Max said. "Too many bad things happened to her in Seattle. Her own mother was a junkie, you know, and her father abandoned the two of them while Sandrine was a little girl."

Aubrey returned from the Fair in May insisting that Sandrine attend. She wanted her mother to see the giant circular fountain that sprayed jets of water high in the air, and she wanted her to go up the Space Needle and ride the monorail. Sandrine said she'd go, but she kept putting it off until here it was the end of August. Unfortunately, a neighbor lady who had promised to go with her had gone off to California to help out at a niece's confinement. Also, one of the waitresses at the café had quit and moved to Missouri. Being shorthanded at the café, Max felt he couldn't go with

Sandrine. But somebody had to and then, as Max said, it hit him like a bolt of lightening who that would be.

"I don't know why I didn't think of you earlier," he said. "You are the one, Lewis! You're solid, you're religious, you've got ethics. Everybody respects you."

I began shaking my head the instant I understood what he wanted of me.

"Now don't get in a hurry to say no," Max said. "Sandrine has feelings for Seattle. She wants to go. She needs to go. But she shouldn't go alone. Somebody responsible has to go with her. That's just all there is to it."

I shook my head even more emphatically.

"Please just listen me out," he said. "You are worrying about the appearances of it. Beaufort isn't a place that pays any attention to things like that. After all, this is the twentieth century. We're not a bunch of Victorians. I know it would be a big imposition on you. I'll give you the money for tickets and meals and a tank of gas. And my gosh, Lewis, you need to go for your own sake. The summer's coming to an end, and you'll be heading back to Utah shortly. You don't want to leave Washington without visiting Seattle."

Eventually I agreed to do it—not that night, but the next Tuesday after I had thought it over for a week. I agreed partly because Max had pressed me so urgently but mostly because it seemed a breach of my faith, a denial of my testimony, to suppose a young man born of goodly Mormon parents might be susceptible to thoughts of adultery even while spending a long, intimate day with the most beautiful woman he had ever met.

The following Tuesday—only a couple of weeks from the scheduled end of my internship—I rolled out of my bunk at a very early hour. My roommate, who was still in his bunk, got up on an elbow and watched me. "Where are you going at this god-awful time of the day?" he said.

"To visit the Fair."

He shook his head and lay back. "Well, have a good time."

"I doubt that I will," I said. "It's more or less a duty, just to accommodate a friend."

When I picked up Sandrine, Max came out of the house to see us off. He wrung my hand with gratitude. As I escorted Sandrine

to my old Chevrolet, she paused and looked back. She didn't seem happy. "Go on, honey," Max called. "Have a good time." She waved and we went on. She slid into her seat and I closed the door.

She was wearing a cotton dress and an open sweater. The dress was light blue, with buttons from waist to collar. When she was standing, the hem came slightly below her knees, though of course, when she was seated in the car, it rested slightly above. A lot of people have bony knees. Not Sandrine. Knees, calves, ankles, whatever—as I've said, she was perfection.

We drove for a while without saying much. The silence made me uncomfortable. Words, even banal ones, cover awkward emotions, and I for one was feeling a lot of awkward emotions. At a station on the outskirts of Puyallup, I stopped for gasoline and used the restroom. As we resumed our drive, Sandrine said, "I'm sorry you have to do this for me. But Max wouldn't give up on it. Neither would Aubrey."

"I'm glad to do it," I lied.

"Max is a good man."

"I know he is," I said.

"It isn't his fault I'm a mess," she said.

What could I say to that?

After awhile we passed some goats in a pasture. "They look peaceful," Sandrine said. Her voice struck me as envious.

"I suppose they are," I said. "Their lives aren't very complicated." It occurred to me then that being beautiful might be a terrible handicap for a girl born into precarious circumstances.

"Do you have goats on your farm in Utah?" she said.

"Yes. A pair of them—Sadie and Eliza."

We glanced at each other and she gave me a brief flicker of an incandescent smile.

"What's it like on your farm?" she said.

I began to talk, glad for the topic. I told her our farm was in the middle of a long dry valley. There were drab hills on either side, dotted by scrub juniper and sparse yellow range grass—quite a contrast to the green vines, ferns, and flowers flourishing beneath the towering canopy of the Northwest forests. We had a couple of irrigated fields; otherwise, we planted dry land to winter wheat. I attended grade school in a hamlet called Snowville, and I

went to high school in Garland, a fifty-mile bus ride each way, which meant I left home long before dawn and got home long after dusk in the middle of the winter. We drove to Tremonton for groceries and we attended church in Snowville. Sandrine wanted to know who “we” were. I told her it included my father and mother and my sisters Harriet and Melanie, Harriet being still in grade school and Melanie coming up on her junior year at Bear River High School in Garland. Then, just as an afterthought, I told Sandrine my father was the first Mullen to become a Mormon, but my mother’s line, the Bucyruses, traced their Mormonism back almost to the beginnings in Kirtland, Ohio, which gave her and her family a leg up in the pecking order among their fellow Mormons.

When I glanced at Sandrine, I saw she had relaxed. I supposed she was projecting a lot of wish fulfillment onto my family—likely more than it merited because my father was something of an authoritarian grump and my mother was a world-class worrier.

When we reached Seattle, I parked across the street from the Fair, which was taking place on a large spread of land that is now called Seattle Center. While we stood on the street corner waiting for the traffic light to change, I saw that the tense look had returned to Sandrine’s face. I felt a bit unnerved myself, being reminded how much I hated the rattle and roar of big city traffic. As far as I was concerned, the traffic in Logan, which had no more than 15,000 residents in 1962, was far too thick.

I couldn’t guess how many acres the Fair occupied, but it was enough to get lost in. There were exhibits beyond counting, some of them taking up whole buildings. Theoretically, all the exhibits pointed toward the twenty-first century, the title of the Fair being Century 21 Exposition. I was pleased to see Sandrine get caught up in some of the exhibits. We both liked the displays about space exploration in the United States Science Pavilion, which consisted of several substantial buildings surrounding a courtyard of Gothic arches perched atop slender spider-like legs. Later on I learned that it was a show of bravado for the United States. Our nation was scrambling to make up for the Soviet Union having put up a satellite ahead of us in 1957.

When we emerged from the United States Science Pavilion, I suggested we go up the Space Needle. At the base, we craned our

necks and gaped at the rotating observation deck some 500 feet above us. Ticket holders were queued in a long serpentine line, and a sign at the ticket office predicted a wait of four hours. "It's not worth the wait," Sandrine said.

Just then a man stepped forward and said, "You want to go up? I've got a pair of dinner passes for tonight at 7:00. You get to go to the head of the line. One hundred bucks."

I looked him over. One hundred dollars in 1962 was worth about six hundred today. That's a lot of money for a guy living on a forestry intern's stipend.

"I've got a family emergency," the man said. "I've got to drive to Spokane."

I was about to say nothing doing when I glanced at Sandrine. Her face glowed. So I pulled out my wallet. This was my introduction to scalping. I understood the concept instantly though it would be several years before I encountered the term for it. It was a good experience for me. The naïve have to be trained somehow.

Sandrine and I wandered next into Show Street, a causeway lined with vendor booths. Sandrine paused at a booth selling Alaskan totem figurines. She considered buying one for Aubrey, but decided against it, explaining that Max had bought her a lot of souvenirs when they came in May. A little further along, we came to an arcade featuring peep shows. I stopped and stared, wondering whether a peep show was something like a Punch and Judy show. Smiling slightly, Sandrine said, "I don't think you want to go in there." I realized then that only men were going in and coming out, and my face reddened. I turned and we went back to the entrance of the causeway.

Just outside the entrance, we met an unkempt, sallow-faced fellow who wore a short, patchy beard. Stepping in front of us, he uttered an incredulous, "My God, it's Reen! Babe! Where ya been? Oh, for Christ's sake, imagine running into you here!"

For an instant I assumed it was a case of mistaken identity. But an instant later, I saw it wasn't. Sandrine knew the fellow all too well. Stricken and horrified, she shrank behind me. Something chemical happened inside me. "Get lost," I said to the unkempt fellow, "or I'll put you down." Being a pacifist by nature, I was sur-

prised by the harsh, mean tone in my voice. In any event, the unkempt fellow melted into the crowd and we didn't meet him again.

Sandrine was trembling. No, it was more than that. She was utterly shaken—tears in her eyes, taut shoulders, hands nervously twisting the strap of her purse. Obviously, Max had summarized her past accurately. There was something dire, revolting, truly calamitous about it. The unkempt fellow hadn't seemed *that* ominous to me. In fact, I would have thought him simply nondescript, if indeed I had thought anything about him at all upon some chance encounter. Yet Sandrine's recoil—her terrified eyes, her dive behind my back—implied the presence of a creature who fed on the desolation of others.

Proposing lunch to settle her nerves, I offered her the crook of my arm. She slid her arm through mine and pressed against me as we strolled on. I wondered whether my unthinking offer of the arm was a mistake. I hoped she wouldn't interpret it as something more than a gentlemanly gesture.

We had passed several restaurants in our wandering but Sandrine chose Greek food from an open-sided van. We sat on a varnished wood bench, eating our gyros and baklava and watching iridescent arcs of water spout from the great circular fountain that had fascinated Aubrey so much. The sun was out, the sky was blue, people flocked around us, hurdy-gurdy music tinkled cheerfully in the background. Sandrine scarcely noticed. She was abstracted and withdrawn, thinking—as I supposed—of those dank alleys from which Max had rescued her. I'll admit that I was abstracted and withdrawn too. I couldn't help pondering the diseases she might have picked up on the streets—herpes, gonorrhea, syphilis, chlamydia, or who knew what else?

Eventually, our silence struck me as a mutual display of poor manners and I asked Sandrine the name of the unkempt fellow.

She said, "Noose."

"Noose!"

"That's all I ever heard him called."

"It's too bad we ran into him," I said.

She nodded, her eyes averted.

"Though it doesn't really matter," I said. "He's just a reminder of how lucky you are."

I waited for a response that didn't come. "You've got a good

home,” I explained. “As you say, Max is a good man. You’ve got Aubrey.”

“Yes, I’ve got Aubrey. If it weren’t for her, I’d leave.”

“Don’t you love Max?”

She raised her eyebrows, surprised.

“I don’t love anybody,” she said.

“But you do love Aubrey, don’t you?”

“Yes, but that’s not the kind of love I’m talking about.”

It was my turn to look surprised.

“I’ve never fallen in love with anyone,” she said. “I’d like to.”

I stood up and moved off a few steps. “Let go ride the monorail,” I suggested. She got up and took my arm without it being offered.

The monorail was a light train that as its name implied ran on a single track. It was next to another single track that bore the return train, the two trains giving the appearance of colliding as they approached each other—one of many illusions of the day, I would later think. The track ran about a mile to a station in the center of the city. We got off and sat on a bench watching people use escalators between the station and the street below.

“We could go to Pike Place and watch the fish mongers,” she said. “Or down to Elliott Bay and watch the ferries.”

“If you want to,” I replied.

We went on watching people as if nothing had been said between us. After a while we got on the monorail and went back to the Fair. I suggested we take in the Fine Arts Pavilion, where world-famous works of art had been gathered from dozens of museums. The place was crowded and we filed along slowly, reading descriptions of the paintings and statues from a printed guide. I was overawed by the artists: El Greco, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, among others, some of whom I had encountered in a humanities class at Utah State. We came to a painting of the dead body of Jesus being lifted gently from the cross by his desolate followers. Sandrine turned away, shuddering.

“Can we go?” she pleaded.

We returned to the bench near the circular fountain. “I’m sorry to be such a spoil sport,” Sandrine said. “I’m a mess, just a mess.”

"Do you want to go home?" I asked. "We could give away our dinner tickets. Or maybe somebody will buy them."

She said no and at seven we went to the entrance to the Space Needle where we found the scalper's promise held good, our tickets admitting us within minutes of being presented. In the restaurant at the top, the *maître d'* seated us on a terrace somewhat back from the windows but elevated enough to give a view. We dined on steamed mussels and grilled salmon garnished with ginger and orange peel. In the meantime, the pod did a full 360-degree rotation, allowing us to take in the city, the Sound, and two mountain ranges—the Cascades to the east, the Olympics to the west. And, of course, southeastward Rainier loomed in the gathering evening.

Long before the pod had completed its rotation, Sandrine had become radiant, and I was struck again by the intense beauty of her features.

At one point she said, "Can you believe that I love this city?"

"Well, yes, if you say so," I said. "But I wouldn't have thought it. It seems pretty loaded with bad memories for you."

"It is," she agreed, "but I love it anyway."

"I guess I can understand that," I said. I was thinking it was a matter of perspective. Here at the top of the Space Needle, we were above the jostling bodies, the grime, the fetid motivations of predatory human beings. The diminished buildings and streets merged with water, forest, and mountains so that, yes, from this angle it was a beautiful city.

"This has been a very happy day for me," she said. "Thank you for bringing me."

"I've liked it too," I said. I wasn't lying. From our current vantage point, we could see a couple of ferries, whose wakes plowed a white furrow upon the darkling Sound. It was a surreal scene, a transformation of reality.

Then she said, "May I ask you something personal?" and I intuitively knew trouble lay ahead. "Have you ever been in love?"

"We'd better go," I spluttered. "People are waiting for a table."

"Have you?" she insisted.

"There was a girl I dated during my freshman year at Utah State," I said. "I could have fallen in love with her if she had let me.

The missionary she was waiting for came home at the end of the year and they got married.”

We got up and made our way to an elevator. She took my arm while we made our descent. It was full dark by the time we left the elevator and crossed the street to my car. I unlocked the door on the passenger’s side and pulled it open. Rather than getting in, she faced me, closely. “Could you fall in love with me if I let you?” she said.

I froze.

“I’m not waiting for a missionary,” she said.

She got into the car. I went around to the other side and got behind the wheel. She slid close to me—the old Chevrolet having a bench seat that allowed for that. “I *do* know what it is to fall in love,” she said. “I’m in love with you.”

I didn’t start the engine immediately. I had to digest, to assimilate, what was happening. Having been invited to fall in love with Sandrine, I had. Or, to put it more accurately, I was able to admit now that I had been in love with her all along. Moreover, as I recognized all too clearly, she had invited me to a moral disaster. If I wanted to make love to her now—on this very night—I had only to ask.

I started the engine and steered the car onto the busy street. My mother’s earnest voice sounded in my memory: *if it comes to having to make a choice, I’d rather you be good than happy*. My duty was clear. There was no debate as to what I ought to do. I had had a sound Mormon raising. It was what made Mormon men good candidates for the FBI and Secret Service.

Sandrine turned on the car radio and picked up a disc jockey on a Tacoma station. The first song we heard was Ella Fitzgerald with “My Happiness,” an old song that had recently had something of a revival. “Three Coins in the Fountain” followed, also “Vaya Con Dios” and a new one neither of us had ever heard before, “Can’t Help Falling in Love with You.” When sad love stories are made into movies, they are set to haunting music. It has occurred to me that, if this account were made into a movie, one of the songs we heard on the radio that night might serve for the Sandrine theme, as I suppose it would be called.

Unfortunately, that mellow music undid me. My carefully

honed inhibitions receded. They lowered their voices and crept off stage. I kept thinking of a condom machine I had seen in the restroom of the station where I had bought gasoline that morning. My mind was in a dizzy whirl. I couldn't believe Lewis Mulenax would ever purchase a condom.

We passed through Puyallup around midnight. The gas station just beyond the city limits was still open. "I need to use the restroom," I said, pulling over. Inside I used the urinal and washed my hands. I put a couple of quarters in the condom machine and pocketed the tiny packet. I returned to the car, and, as Sandrine slid close to me, drove on. The dash lights illuminated her legs. The hem of her dress lay well above her knees. I took my hand from the wheel and caressed her sculpted knee.

Maybe twenty minutes later I pulled off on a Forest Service road, which I followed until it made a bend and we were out of sight of any cars on the highway. I parked and turned out the headlights. An unbroken wall of trees stood on either side of the road; high overhead stretched a strip of star-lit sky.

"Do you have protection?" she said.

"Yes, but I don't know how to use it," I muttered.

"I'll show you," Sandrine said, opening her door. "Let's get into the back seat."

I opened my door and stepped out of the Mormon universe. Sandrine came around to my side and hugged me. She unbuttoned my shirt and ran her hands across my belly and chest. She unlatched the buttons on her dress and undid her bra and stood expectantly. What could I do but caress her breasts? I was eager, feverish, trembling a bit, fully set on not being deterred, and the words *so this is what it is like, so this is what it is like* cycled impetuously through my mind, not ceasing until we had achieved our full purpose and lay clasped in one another's arms, my energy spent, my self-esteem exhausted.

When we got back into the front seat, she again slid close to me. I gripped the wheel and prepared to start the engine. She lay a hand on my arm and said, "When do you leave for Utah?"

"In a couple of weeks," I replied.

"I want to go with you," she said, snuggling against me.

The idea, the prospect, burned at my elbows and in my finger tips, but I couldn't reply. Sandrine had no idea how visible our liai-

son would be in Utah, at least in the part of Utah that I had to return to. I couldn't share an apartment with another man's wife in Logan. Our neighbors would be scandalized. My parents would find out about it and I wouldn't be able to present her to them. If we met them by accident, they wouldn't refuse to speak to her, but they would be devastated, vastly aggrieved, and their faces would show it.

Sandrine read my thoughts. "You don't want me to go," she said, pulling away.

"I'm not going back to Utah," I said. "At least not to stay."

I started the engine and turned the car around. I looked at my watch. It was a little after one. Sandrine snuggled against me again.

"I am going to transfer to the forestry program at the University of Washington," I said. "Or maybe I'll take a job in Tacoma. There's a couple of wood product companies that hire people like me. The question I have is when to tell my parents about you. It would be easier for me to tell them in a letter after I have come back. And I will come back. I promise."

"You don't need to promise," she said. "I know you'll come back."

"The toughest thing we face," I said, "is telling Max."

"And Aubrey," she added.

I pulled onto the highway and accelerated.

"How shall we do it?" she said.

"I can't say," I replied. "I'll do whatever you want me to do."

"Immediately then? Both of us?"

"If you say so."

"It will be terrible," she said, "just terrible!"

She was sitting close to me, but no longer snuggling. She stared straight ahead into the tunnel of light projected by our head beams upon the pavement.

"Not tonight," she said at last. "It would ruin a happy day. You go back to the park. I'll tell Max in private tomorrow. I'll ask if we can keep Aubrey part of the time."

"Will he agree?"

"I don't know," she said. "Probably not. There's no way to force him. Legally, he's her sole custodian."

I could see the writing on the wall. It was time for me to articulate the inevitable. "Maybe you should stay with Max and Aubrey. I'll come on weekends."

"And we'd slip around?" she said.

"Slip around?"

"See each other on the sly. No, please, not that. I am going to live wherever you live—Tacoma, Seattle, I don't care where. I want to be there with you, out in the open."

"All right," I said. "That's how it will be."

She snuggled up to me again, affectionate and happy. I felt euphoric too—though also a little light-headed as if I were coming down with something.

"It's strange, being in love," I said. "It changes everything. Things slide around into new positions."

"Things?"

"Obligations, I mean. You are my obligation now," I said. I meant, of course, that being with her, having her, trumped my Mormon expectations. As I say, I had stepped out of the Mormon universe.

When we arrived, I parked in front of the house and turned off the engine. A porch light burned.

"I won't see you again till next Tuesday?" Sandrine said.

"Yes, as usual."

"I can't do this alone," she said abruptly. "I can't tell them until you come back and are ready to take me with you."

"That makes sense," I said. "Don't tell them. We'll do it together when I come back."

"Yes," she said, "that's what we must do. We'll tell them together."

She kissed me and we both got out of the car. The house door opened and Max stepped onto the porch. She went into the house, murmuring something to Max as she brushed by him. I followed her to the porch. "I'm sorry we're so late," I said to Max. "We kind of did things to the hilt."

"I'm glad you did," Max said. "I can't thank you enough."

"I'll see you next week," I said.

"You better stay here," Max said. "I can fix up the sofa."

"No. I'm on duty at seven. I'd better get on up to the park."

I'll try to abridge my final days at the park. The more I have

thought about them over the years the more I have realized that they qualify hands down as the most painful period of equal duration in my entire life.

The euphoria I felt during our return from the Fair didn't survive the night. I arrived at the bunkhouse in time for a couple of hours of sleep. After the alarm went off, I sat on the edge of my bed for a few minutes, still pretty groggy. My roommate came in from the shower room and looked me over. "Man," he said, "you must have painted that town red!"

I shrugged my shoulders and went to my closet and put on my uniform. I left the bunkhouse and started across the main parking lot, which at this early hour was largely empty of automobiles. I found it difficult to focus my thoughts. I wanted to recapture the happy incredulity of the moment I knew Sandrine loved me. But at the back of my mind was one of those half-spoken sentences that govern human behavior even before they have burst into full recognition. When it did come, a couple of days later, it came in connection with my thoughts about Max and Aubrey, who were to lose that which I was to gain. *A decent person doesn't build happiness on another person's devastation*—that was the thought, which, as I realized, was a translation of my mother's wish that, if push came to shove, I should choose to be good rather than happy.

Ironically, as I now saw, I was destined to be neither good nor happy. I was caught between contradictory imperatives. By assuming an obligation toward Sandrine I had not abrogated an obligation toward Max and Aubrey. For the moment I chose to honor my newly-assumed obligation toward Sandrine. It wasn't an entirely self-serving choice. I had reason to believe her best prospect for happiness lay with me. But I also had reason to believe it would be at best a subdued happiness.

I was eager to see Sandrine on Tuesday—yet profoundly apprehensive. I dithered around the bunkhouse all morning, reviewing my field notes and outlining a report I was required to make to the undergraduate research committee that had funded my summer stipend. In the early afternoon, I drove to Limington, where I interviewed an old woman who had lived her entire life there to see whether she had any memory of Little Quebec and Chambers

Landing. Unfortunately, she didn't—which meant those logging camps would appear as no more than names in my report.

Toward evening I backtracked to Beaufort—through which I had driven on my way to Limington. My stomach knotted as I walked into the café. Max beamed with pleasure when he saw me. “Come in, come in!” he said. “Your meal is on the house tonight. You better have a steak with a side of smoked potato salad, which Sandrine made today. It's meet-the-teacher night over at the school, so she's off with Aubrey just now, but they'll be back soon.”

I was relieved to find things so normal. I don't know why I should have expected them to be otherwise. I wasn't hungry, not in the slightest, but when Max put the food before me, I ate. Sandrine and Aubrey came in about the time I finished. Aubrey climbed onto the stool next to me and gave me a big gap-toothed smile. Sandrine went behind the counter and stood beside Max. Her face was taut and her fingers fidgety. I told her the potato salad was delicious and she smiled a little. At that instant I knew, as if by precognition, that I wouldn't be coming back. She and I had had our moment of happiness, and now it was over and we were in for a lot of grieving.

When I left, she followed me out to my car. She put her arms about me and began to sob.

“We can't go through with it, can we?” I said.

“I thought I could,” she sobbed. “I really did.”

“I know you did. I thought I could too.”

“He's too good a man,” she said. “He bet on me when nobody else would. He's kind. He has no end of patience.”

“Yes, and he needs you,” I said. “And Aubrey needs you too.”

“And I need her,” Sandrine said. “I'm split in two.”

There wasn't much else to be said—though there was a great deal of pondering to be done, at least for me. If I had briefly stepped out of the Mormon universe, I was now confronted by the necessity of reentering it. I knew in advance it would take a while.

I came back to Beaufort on the following Friday, which was the day my employment officially ended. I arrived in the early afternoon on that day, having packed my car and said goodbye to a few associates in the morning. Max insisted on serving me the lunch special—remarkably tasty, considering that it was hash.

Sandrine stood behind the counter with Max, her face taut and distant. After a few minutes, she pulled a basket with yarn and knitting needles from under the counter and prepared to knit.

"I didn't know you knitted," I said.

"I'm learning," she said. "The woman down the road is showing me how."

When I was through eating, she set the basket under the counter and said, "Drive me over to the school. I promised Aubrey I would come in and bring her out to say goodbye. Her teacher won't mind."

I got out of the car when Aubrey emerged from the school. She wept a little while she hugged me. "You'll come back, won't you?" she said.

"I will."

"And will you write to us while you are gone?"

"You bet I'll write."

"Promise?"

"Yes, I promise," I said.

Sandrine took Aubrey back into the class and when she returned, she slid across the seat to my side of the car and gave me a long, passionate kiss before returning to the passenger's side. We both knew I had lied when I told Aubrey I would come back. But I did send a Christmas card for a few years.

As I started the engine, Sandrine said, "You mustn't stay single. You must find a good woman. I won't be jealous."

"Don't say that!" I protested. The thought of another woman seemed an infidelity, a sacrilege.

When we got back to the café, Max came out onto the steps. Sandrine got out of the car and joined Max on the steps. I waved to them and drove away. I took State Route 410 toward Yakima. Crossing over Chinook Pass near sunset, I caught spectacular glimpses of Rainier in alpenglow. Passing into shadow on the downward side, I lost sight of the mountain's immense singularity. I tried not to grieve. I wanted to forget the summer of the Seattle Fair. I wanted to forget Max and his café, the fairy child Aubrey, even Sandrine. Yes, especially Sandrine! The sooner forgotten, the better.

But of course forgetting Sandrine was impossible. First of all,

as I have said, I had to grapple with the problem of reentering the Mormon universe. As far as my parents ever knew, I had never left it. But my bishop knew because I told him. I was fortunate in that he gave me a confidential penance, consisting not only of total regularity in performing my duties but also of a quarterly interview with him. Despite his kindness, I found these interviews harrowing, largely because I judged myself incapable of a complete repentance—I could renounce *being with* Sandrine, but I couldn't renounce *loving* her. So the quarterly interviews stretched on for a second year, at the end of which the bishop got tired of the process and declared me a member in full and unblemished standing.

Three years after that, I met a young Mormon woman whom I wanted to marry. I explained up front what had happened during the summer of the Seattle Fair. When I asked her to marry me, she knew that as far as my private feelings were concerned, it was to be my second marriage. She knew I would come to our wedding as a widower. I am grateful that she accepted me on those terms.

Hank Toy's Devil

Jack Harrell

A devil came to an old Mormon on an icy winter night when mounds of snow outside, as big as cars, lay black and cold, nearly invisible. Having searched since the beginning of the world, this devil found the man in a clapboard house on the edge of an Idaho town settled by pioneers who'd halted on their way to Canada, fearing harsher winters farther north. Hank Toy had lived eighty-seven years in this town of a few roads and houses, a tiny post office, and a gas station long since boarded up. He'd raised a family and made a living fixing machines in open wheat fields and dank potato barns, unaware that an ancient devil had ranged the world for millennia, seeking its one last hope in him. Hank had simply turned on the kitchen light and the thing was there. Hank gripped the handles of his cart—an aluminum walker with wheels and handbrakes. He clenched his jaw, standing unmoved in his dingy t-shirt and thread-bare Wranglers trousers. He'd come to the kitchen to wash his dishes and take out the trash. His daughter Jeanne was coming up from Pocatello in the morning, and she'd been watching for signs that he could no longer care for himself. Each week she burst through the front door calling out, "How you doing, Dad?" Looking past him, scrutinizing the house, she never waited for an answer. If Jeanne found him in the kitchen, frozen like a statue and staring at a devil, her sister, Trudy, would make her put Hank in a nursing home for sure.

The old man might have thought an animal had gotten into the house—a big dog or even a bear. The thing smelled like a bear, a mixture of garbage and metal. But it couldn't have been an animal. The doors were locked and the windows were shut against the cold, against the snow that had come down for eleven days, leaving the old man bound inside to lurch around with his cart. When Hank turned on the light, the devil was simply standing

there, oily and seething like a corpus of writhing worms. Too lonely to be afraid, too old to be startled, Hank didn't speak. He simply reached up and flicked off the light. He turned his cart and shuffled in toward the living room, where the television chattered like a silly monkey.

Then the devil, who'd once had a name but had long forgotten it, spoke two words. "Help me," it said.

Hank Toy turned his head, held it there. He couldn't see the devil in the dark kitchen, but he could smell it.

"Help me," the thing repeated.

Hank knew the voice of a liar, even though the thing hadn't yet lied. "Go to hell," Hank said, looking forward now, wheeling toward the dancing light of the TV.

"You don't remember?" the thing asked.

Hank had lived a long time. Memory was all he had.

"You were there," the devil said, whispering from behind. "You're the one I remember."

"I been right here my whole life," Hank answered.

"You wept for me," the devil said. "When the glorious Sons of the Morning were cast out of heaven for rebellion, you wept. You have to remember that."

"No, I don't," Hank said, and he dropped into his green chair to stare at the TV.

Hank didn't know this devil. He only knew what the Bible and the Mormon scriptures said, that God had had children before the heavens and earth were formed, and a third of these hosts rebelled and fell to earth, becoming the devil and his angels.

"You knew me," the devil said to Hank. "Before the War in Heaven, you knew me and you wept."

Hank looked down at the hands in his lap. His left hand had been without its middle finger for forty years, cut off in the gears of a conveyor belt. His other hand and wrist had been swollen as big as a softball since the stroke. Seeing his crippled hands, Hank knew he was still alive, alive in his green chair as a devil orbited around him now, slow and heavy in its own dark gravity.

"We only wanted to save you," the devil said, "save you from a wicked world."

"I got no truck with you," Hank said to the devil. "I got work to

do." He had to get the kitchen floor swept and the trash out before Jeanne came.

The devil slowed its orbit, its voice the low rumble of a tractor's engine. "Remembering you," it said, "looking for you—it's all that kept me from flying apart."

Hank blinked hard, the smell thick in his nose.

The devil circled before him. "I combed the earth, looked in the face of every man ever born. Finding you. . . . Find you, find you. . . . You kept me from losing myself. Saved me until this day." The dark thing was writhing, turning in on itself again and again. In its contortions it didn't touch the floor, couldn't touch the floor, it seemed.

Gripping his walker with his better hand, thinking he might be losing his mind at last, Hank pulled himself to his feet and began to wheel toward the kitchen in preparation for his daughter's visit. She came once a week, bringing groceries, doing the cleaning she thought he'd left undone. Sometimes she took him for rides in the car, his face turned like a dog's to the wide fields and great western sky. Would she see the thing when she came? Would she admit it?

"Speak," the devil said.

Hank wheeled slowly, ignoring the thing, not wanting to lose his grip.

His daughter would be full of questions. "Did the Grant boys shovel the sidewalk?" "How long has the furnace made that noise?" "Where'd you get that bruise?" "Why is there a devil in the kitchen?" She might be cleaning the tub or walking him to the car, one question on the heels of another. "You never tell me anything," she'd say. He would look around, trying to follow her eyes, her words that moved too fast. How was he supposed to know every little thing?

"We're going to make a list," she said one day. "We'll make it together."

They sat at the kitchen table while she wrote down the things she wanted him to do each week, things like the dishes and his laundry and the dusting. "If you can do these," she said, "no one has to worry about you."

Mostly she worried about letting him stay in the old house

alone. Trudy wanted to put him in Autumn Hills, an assisted living facility. But Trudy lived in Michigan and Jeanne lived just an hour away, in Pocatello. Jeanne didn't want any regrets. "Let's not prove Trudy right," she'd say, kissing Hank's cheek when she left.

Hank labored toward the kitchen, his devil at his shoulder. "God loves you," the devil said. "You walk in His image. You can speak for me."

"Who'd speak for me?" Hank asked.

"You knew it was wrong," the thing said. Its voice turned soft, like a seductress. "I looked for you among the righteous. You were my friend. You were there, my friend."

The thing encircled Hank once again, moving and swirling, like thin traces of smoke in the air. "Power upon thee, my friend, over lives and deaths."

"You can't do anything to me," Hank said, hoping it was true. "You're not even here."

"You loved me then," the devil sang in a hundred circles around its mark. "You wept, in your goodness you wept."

As Hank wheeled through the devil's cloud, hours and days spun forward and backward. He switched on the kitchen light and the devil was before him, looking like Rod Wooster, son of old man Wooster and general manager of Wooster Farms, a big potato operation that employed Hank so many years ago. "Good man," the devil in Rod's form said. "That's good work." Hank fixed machines. Rod worked a different machinery—state agencies, market forces, family alliances, bankers, and potato brokers. "Befriend the mammon of unrighteousness," Rod liked to say. "Scripture says so." A boss cheated migrant workers on their pay, someone altered figures on a federal application, a grandson lied about how a \$50,000 truck got in a ditch, and Rod Wooster had an answer: "It's how things get done."

"Speak out of turn and you get fired," Rod told Hank. So Hank stayed quiet.

Returning to its writhing form, the devil said, "I searched for an upright man. I knew you wouldn't be a hypocrite."

But Hank had compromised, too many times to count. And not just for Rod Wooster. For every potato boss and mucky-muck and every ambitious church leader. What choice did he have? One day he was eighteen and driving a grain truck down St. Anthony's

Main Street when he saw Miss Potato Harvest 1942 in front of the Arcadia Theater, her strawberry hair dancing in the wind, her lithe figure the very secret of life. They married and had a house full of children. Hank gave his life for them, working muscle and brain beneath tractors and harvesters and under the open hoods of potato trucks. How could he not sacrifice everything he had to their goodness, their sweetness and their need? He put in sixteen-hour days, skipped meals, pushed until he was too tired to feel tired. Didn't his wife need a place to live, a place to shelter her babies? Didn't those kids need clothes and money in their college funds? For them he would have carried all the potato trucks in Idaho on his back. In the cold and damp, hands grappling with dirty engines, he endured managers and salesmen and grandsons. He suffered the men who wore clean shoes and didn't farm but told farmers how to farm—buzz-headed government men with regulation books too thick to read, rules made for those who couldn't read them.

He even watched a man die and said nothing. What goodness did he have after that?

"You were the noble one," the devil whispered, penetrating Hank's cloud of confusion. "You had to compromise."

The stormy swirl cleared, leaving Hank alone in his own kitchen to wonder how many hours had passed, how much life was left before him. He stilled for a moment, his gut heavy with regret. Then, lifting his eyes, he saw the devil before him in the likeness of a state agent wearing a three-piece suit. Small and effeminate, bald-headed, a forced smile across its ethereal face, the devil said, "Shake on it, friend."

Hank shook the devil's hand, feeling nothing there.

"See," the devil said. "No tricks."

"I've got no goodness to give," Hank said, wheeling forward, easing the suited devil to one side.

"Don't you want justice?" the devil asked.

"Whose justice?"

"Didn't God level you with his judgment? Didn't he hit you like a hammer?"

The stroke had put Hank in a hospital bed for the first time in his life. He lay there for days, his daughter Jeanne tending him,

nurses feeding and changing him like a baby. What good was a man who couldn't work? The arm of flesh had finally failed him. So the world was unfair. Like a fool he'd fallen for it. He couldn't drive a pickup or grease a joint or put a wrench to a bolt. His children had their own lives. His wife had worked herself into a grave before him. None of that mattered when he couldn't wipe his own rear.

In the darkened hospital room, still and naked, he found a woody, stubborn core at his center—not hope, but fact. He would live. He would live by the same grit that had centered him in muddy fields beneath Buck Foster's International Harvester on rainy October nights. With no other reason to live but this, the fact that he lived, he got up and walked. When Jeanne came in the next morning, he spoke to her through the un-paralyzed side of his face. "Home," he said.

"Trudy says you need to be in Autumn Hills," she answered.

Hank knew people in that place, old people with no life in them. "No," he said, "home."

The boys—Hank's grown sons—cared the way sons care. They didn't say anything when Jeanne brought up Autumn Hills. They had families and work and were no help at all. A few days later, despite Trudy's protests, Jeanne took Hank to his empty home, where he fixed his own meals and took his cart outside, jostling over the gravel as he went to the corner and back. He'd made it through the summer and fall, alone and stubborn. But now winter had left him shut up in the house, shut up with a devil.

Smiling before him now in his three-piece suit, the devil said, "The cleaner the shoes, the dirtier the business."

A knot twisted tighter in Hank's brain, the devil's webby reasoning.

"God sits in heaven like a potato boss," the devil said. "In his clean shoes he judges us, down here in the filth."

"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," Hank countered.

"We only fought for what we believed in."

"Believing something don't make it true."

"Hasn't time proven we were right? Look at the world. Didn't we prophesy? Give man agency and you'd get blood and horror.

We only wanted a compromise—like you, like the way you lived your life.”

“I had a wife and babies. They came first.”

“Noble compromise,” the devil said. “Not His way at all—all or nothing, iron rods and fists. . . .”

The devil began to spin around old Hank Toy once again, as fast as the flywheel on a John Deere Model R. “You have to speak for me,” it said, becoming once again its slick and seething self. “His Son died for you. He’ll listen to you.”

A man dead, a father, a son on trial—that’s what it came to, years ago on a cold day in October. Hank was in the fields that afternoon, working on a stalled ten-wheeled truck. He stood on the front tire, bent into the engine cavity, while Braxton, one of the Wooster grandsons, sat in the cab and shouted orders at the migrant workers—one a fifty-year-old called “Chucho,” the other, Javier, who was barely twenty. Chucho and Javier went behind the truck, and pretty soon Hank saw the smoke from their cigarettes. Looking in the big side mirror, the boy saw it too. “Grandpa doesn’t want those Mexicans smoking,” he said.

“Is he gonna come out here, thirty miles from the office, and stop ‘em?” Hank asked.

The boy said, “Watch this,” and he hit the starter, just for a moment. The truck lurched six feet backward, throwing Hank to the dirt and knocking Chucho under the truck, behind the wheels. Then the boy must have panicked. He must have pushed in the clutch or thrown the truck in neutral. Hank was unable to get to his feet as the dual wheels rolled over Chucho, crushing him. Before the old man died, before the ambulance came, Javier walked off through the fields and was never seen again, leaving Hank the only witness.

The county coroner served on the high council with old man Wooster. “I did an autopsy on that old Mexican,” the coroner told Hank. “He was full of cancer. No need to tear up a boy’s life over a Mexican that’s almost dead anyway.” Old man Wooster drove the point home: “Take your pick, Hank, a conscience or a paycheck.”

Standing face to face with a devil now, his goodness lost long ago, Hank gripped the handles of his cart and wheeled toward a black plastic bag full of trash that stood next to the kitchen gar-

bage can. He could get the trash out, at least, before his daughter came. All his life he'd worked. He could work now, even if it didn't save him.

"God will listen to you," the devil repeated. "You compromised because of your goodness."

"God didn't compromise," Hank said. "He cast you out forever. Leave me alone, now," he said. "I got garbage to take out."

Bracing himself on the cart, Hank reached down with his good hand to grasp the knotted neck of the plastic bag. As he straightened, the flash of a car's headlights moved across the curtains.

"Someone's coming," the devil said.

"No one's coming. My daughter's coming in the morning."

"It is morning," the devil said, encircling Hank once again. Spinning a dozen circles around him in a moment, the thing mocked him: "It's morning and she's here."

Hank tried to look up at the clock, but the blur of the spinning devil made the clock spin too.

"She's here. She's coming. She knows what you did."

"What did I do?" Hank asked. He dragged the bag toward the back door, a trail of something liquid and sour forming in his wake. "What did I do?"

"You wept for God's enemies."

Hank opened the back door. He winced at the rush of frigid air from outside. "I did what I did and I'll take the punishment," he said.

"It's not right," the devil said. "It's not right."

The back yard was blackness until Hank switched on the yellow bulb over the steps, casting a veil of amber over the crystalline surface of the snow. An iron rail led down three icy steps to a narrow sidewalk cleared of snow by the regular efforts of the Grant boys. The snow stood three feet high on either side of the walkway. At the bottom of the stairs, a spot in the yard had been cleared for the green dumpster that belonged to the county. Hank simply had to get the bag into the dumpster. The Grant boys could wheel it to the street in the morning.

"No savior died for us," the devil said. "We were judged without mercy."

Hank stepped down to the landing, leaving his cart in the doorway. "You wanted to save yourselves."

"We fell the farthest. Shouldn't we have the greatest savior?"

Hank let the screen door close behind him. He reached out. The iron railing was frosty and cold and it stuck to his papery skin. Putting one foot on the step, Hank gripped the garbage bag with his good hand. He leaned on the cold railing, the devil orbiting his head like a ghostly, whirlwind snake.

"Remembering you," it hissed, "remembering you . . . kept me from losing myself. The others, they don't know who they are. They've all lost themselves. But we're brothers, my friend. I had you—the thought of you—to hold myself together all those years."

"I don't know you," Hank said.

"You were there. You knew it was wrong."

Putting his weight on the rail, Hank wondered if any man could be his own. The ones he loved, he loved so much. He worked and pushed for them, easing out just enough space to eat and breathe. How could he blame anyone else for his own compromises? Bosses and companies, governments and crooks, Gods and devils weren't to blame for a man's choices. Hank was no savior, but for the ones he loved he sold his soul. Too bad his soul couldn't cover the debt.

"You knew it was wrong," the devil said in a voice of reverence and sadness.

Hank teetered as he set his foot on the next icy step.

"God sent us down to fail."

Even in the yellow porch light Hank could hardly see for the devil's cloud.

"That's why you wept."

When the flash of a car's headlights swept a corner of the back yard, Hank stiffened.

"God's to blame," the devil said. "Judge him yourself."

A dog barked in the distance, and Hank moved to take a step. When he did, his feet simply flew out from beneath him. He came down on one shoulder before both kneecaps slapped the cold concrete of the sidewalk. His head and face lit into the hardened inches of snow next to the dumpster as his body twisted and tumbled between the narrow walls of snow on either side. His right

hand came to rest on the bottom step, the garbage bag landing at his feet.

For a moment, all was silence. No devil swirled.

Lifting his head in the stillness, Hank saw blood in the snow, blood on his hands. He let his head fall to the sharp contours of the hardened snow. He might have groaned once, a wordless shudder, as thick wheels of pain coursed from hip to crown. His swollen hand twitched. His legs were useless. He wouldn't be getting up from this. Half the night passed before Hank Toy's devil returned, subdued and reverent. "My god, you've fallen," the devil said in nearly a whisper. "You've fallen."

The porch light burned above Hank, illuminating soft snowflakes drifting in the stark yellow light. Hank laid patient in his t-shirt and Wranglers, too cold to feel the finer matter of spirit extricating itself from bone and flesh. He knew what awaited, more terrific than death: the door of God's judgment—plain fact coming down upon his head.

"I can't be blamed for this," the devil said, circling above Hank like a wheel.

"God is a judge," Hank said.

"I was wronged," the devil said. "I've always been wronged."

The brittle plastic of the garbage bag crackled in the cold air. Hank felt warmed by the snow melting on his neck. The icy concrete beneath him grew soft, giving way for his old muscles to relax. Closing his eyes, head resting comfortably on the snow, Hank remembered the boys who brought him the sacrament each Sunday, the older Grant boy and Pete Maynard, knocking a quick one-two-three rap before coming into the house to find Hank in his green chair, the TV off for the only hour of the week.

"Brother Toy?" one of the boys would call as they came in. The boys wore white shirts, the sleeves rolled up, their ties too long or too short, their dress shoes scuffed. Even on the coldest days they never wore jackets. Sixteen, tall and hip-less, not wearing belts, their dark slacks held up by a mystery, the boys came in and prepared emblems to represent the body and blood of Christ—bread broken in a silver tray, and water in a tiny plastic cup.

Folding their thin arms, heads bowed, unaware of compromises yet to come, the boys stood before Hank as one blessed the bread first: ". . . to the souls of all those who partake of it."

Hank would reach forth his trembling hand and bring the crust to his mouth. Not because he was worthy, but because God had bid it.

The melting snow now trickled down Hank Toy's neck. His belly swelled and sank with each breath. His legs felt like disconnected things. He lifted his good hand, trembling, as though he might be reaching for a tiny cup of water, an emblem of blood shed on an ignoble cross.

"You didn't fight," the devil said, despondent at the icy close of Hank Toy's life. "You didn't do anything."

"You said I wept," Hank answered, his voice barely a whisper.

"Because you knew it was wrong."

"It can't be undone."

"No, you're wrong" the devil countered. "God is God. He can do anything. By his slightest whim. . . ."

"A soul's its own," Hank whispered. "God doesn't take that away."

"What kind of heaven has a war?"

Hank lay with his eyes closed, unable to speak.

"We would have redeemed everyone," the devil argued. "We would have made everyone good. You would have never needed to compromise."

Hank Toy inhaled weakly. The devil flew a thousand feet, straight up into the dark night. Hank exhaled and the devil descended like a stone to the frozen earth. "Ah!" the devil cried in horror. "How you will be judged! With such torment you'll be judged!"

Hank lay still as death.

"Stand up," the devil begged. "Stand up and judge him. God was wrong. He wronged you and he wronged me. He says not to judge, but he judged us all."

Hank could barely speak. "God is my judge. I'm not His."

"Stand up," the devil begged. "I'll be like the rest. I won't know who I am. I'll be lost."

But Hank Toy didn't stand up. He died, leaving the poor devil to forget itself forever, its last scrap of rationality vanishing in one last thought—"I'll be lost."

The next morning, Hank Toy's daughter found him dead.

Walking through the front door, sensing the worst, she called out, "Dad, Dad?" The back door was open. The furnace was going. The house was icy cold. She ran to the screen door and threw it open, still calling out, "Dad." Her father lay in the snowy tunnel of the sidewalk, a crow pestering the garbage bag at his feet. The crow took flight as she hurried down the steps, drawn to touch his body, to embrace him and brush the snow from his shoulders.

Hadn't Trudy warned her? "Spare yourself the torture. You'll walk in one day. . . ."

Jeanne waited out front for the EMTs. They found her standing with her arms folded, shivering under the bright winter sun. Months afterwards she would still wonder if she'd done the right thing by letting him spend those last months alone. It was done, of course, and couldn't be undone. But before Trudy and her brothers' wives saw the house, Jeanne cleaned up the place as best she could, wanting them to feel their father had lived his last days in a decent home.

The boys didn't worry her. They simply did what needed to be done, just as their father had. Dutiful in their best slacks and boots, white shirts without ties, western-cut suit jackets, they and their brothers-in-law bore Hank Toy's casket to a corner in the cemetery on the edge of town. Good words were spoken, prayers and praise about steady work and careful choices. No one mentioned compromise or risk, fallen devils or old men falling.

Hank's daughter would always be glad for one thing: that she'd paid the price of finding him herself. Trudy had feared that most of all—finding him and being alone with the fact, even if just for a moment. Being the one who found him, Jeanne got to tell the story. Who among the living knew what had happened anyway? Hank Toy's devil didn't know. It no longer knew itself from all the other devils. The EMTs didn't know. They came and went, having only a job to do. The deputy sheriff, finding no crime, had no interest and drove off without a word. Only Hank's daughter was left to tell what had happened. Her father must have spent the day cleaning the whole house, starting too late, perhaps. Maybe he'd felt a new burst of energy. He just had one task left, taking out the trash. He'd done so well all summer and fall, taking care of himself, fiercely independent, still the good man he'd always been. It

was only an accident, after all. Anyone could fall down the stairs like that. No one was to blame.

But she still wondered if she'd given in too easily, indulged him too much. Even as she fell on his body that morning, brushing the snow from his rigid shoulders, she knew what Trudy would always think, what others might think too. She knew what she herself would think on lonely winter nights for years to come. How could a daughter leave her father to wheel around all day in an empty clapboard house, a stupid TV his only company? Hadn't he given everything for her, for her mother and her siblings? Hadn't he been so alone already? All those long hours in wet fields, working under those unforgiving machines? She could have forced him into Autumn Hills, and maybe she should have. But she'd compromised because she loved him. God would judge her. She had to let God judge her. She told herself not to think about it, to try not to worry. God knew what was right. She would tell herself that, over and over, until it became true.



Brian Christensen
Honey Blue, resin, bronze powder,
wasp material on enameled aluminum,
25"x 12"x 2"



Brian Christensen
Pink,
steel, 56" x 53" x 48"

REVIEWS

A Story-Telling Folk

Tom Mould, *Still, the Small Voice: Narrative, Personal Revelation, and the Mormon Folk Tradition* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2011) 464 pp. Cloth: \$39.95. ISBN: 978-0-87421-817-6

Reviewed by Blair Dee Hodges

Mormons are a story-telling folk. The academic study of Mormon folklore began as a way to collect and analyze stories of pioneer heritage, faith-promoting experiences with the supernatural, end-times prophecies, and other narratives which illuminated Mormon beliefs and values. Twenty-three years ago, Mormon folklorist William A. Wilson described Mormon folklore as “an uncertain mirror for truth,” because even obscured stories tell us truths about those who pass them along. Wilson praised the early efforts of Mormon folklorists such as Austin A. Fife, whose 1956 book *Saints of Sage and Saddle: Folklore Among the Mormons* remains one of the best collections of Mormon folklore to date. Wilson himself has spent years collecting, archiving, and analyzing Mormon folklore and training a small army of students to carry on the legacy. But he felt that folklorists like Fife placed “exaggerated emphasis on the supernatural at the expense of any discussion of Mormon moral and spiritual values and of the motivating principles of sacrifice and service which I knew from experience were essential parts of being Mormon.” He admitted there was no shortage of supernatural tales, but by overemphasizing the supernatural at the expense of the mundane and service-oriented, researchers have created a distorted picture of the overall “value-center” of Mormonism. “The task for future Mormon folklore study,” Wilson admonished, “will be to enlarge the picture, and to bring the images reflected in it into sharper focus.”¹

Tom Mould, associate professor of anthropology and folklore at Elon University in North Carolina, began his own study of Mormon folklore by investigating Mormonism’s “spectacular predictions” and “prophecies” about signs of Jesus’s Second Coming. One of Mould’s colleagues suggested he focus instead on Mormonism’s “deep tradition of personal revelation,” which he felt

would reveal more about “prophecy and prophetic narratives within the LDS Church” than visions of an impending apocalypse (ix, 7). After five years of fieldwork and archival research on the subject of personal revelation, Mould has emerged with a fascinating analysis, ably describing ways that the supernatural and mundane blend in contemporary Mormon lives. Stories of glossalia and angelic visitations are far less frequently shared by practicing Mormons today than are stories about personal revelation. Guidance from God delivered through the “still small voice” is perhaps the largest holdout of Mormon supernaturalism into the 21st century.

As Mould recognizes, the term “folklore” has “competing definitions in popular culture and in academia” (4). Before giving an overview of Mould’s book and describing his method and its relevance for Mormon studies and folklore studies more broadly, I’ll take a moment to clarify definitions.

I. Folklore is not Falselore

In popular imagination “folklore” tends to conjure up ideas about outdated, discredited, or fantastic stories which might be fun, but which don’t offer much in terms of historical veracity. The Wikipedia entry on “Mormon folklore,” for example, focuses almost exclusively on urban legends (such as stories about the Three Nephites). Legends are a *type* of folklore, but certainly not the only type.

The term “folklore” has also been used to distinguish LDS “doctrine” from non-doctrinal speculation, usually of the embarrassing type. For example, during the PBS documentary *The Mormons*, Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles dismissed as “folklore” the claim that black members of the church were denied the priesthood because they had been less valiant during a pre-mortal War in Heaven.² Holland’s statements draw attention to an important tension within the study of Mormon folklore: the boundary between the “folk,” or everyday Mormons, and the LDS hierarchy is somewhat permeable, as folklore often travels from the pews to the pulpit and back again.³

If folklore is not mere “falselore”—questionable teachings or spurious stories—what else does it include? Mould is careful to define the term and his governing assumptions:

[Folklore includes] those expressions of culture that reveal not only the artistry and aesthetics of communal traditions but the shared beliefs and values of a community. As such, folklore is not confined to a finite set of genres but rather describes an approach to the study of culture that recognizes the expressive nature of everyday life, including religious life (4).

Folklore can include older narratives, even sensational or legendary stories, generated by the “folk” which are passed on and reshaped. But it also includes the present stories Mormons tell, and Mould’s work focuses specifically on stories of personal revelation. As Wilson puts it: “Mormon folklore lies not at the periphery but at the center of LDS culture. It is not, as is sometimes thought, simply a survival from the past kept alive primarily by older, less educated, and agrarian Church members; rather, it is a vital, functioning force in the lives of all Latter-day Saints.”⁴

Numerous General Conference addresses, books, testimony meetings, missionary discussions, Sunday School lessons, and personal conversations among Mormons attest that personal revelation is a vital force in the lives of contemporary Mormons. Mould’s overriding goal in this book is to describe the ways Mormons understand personal revelation. More broadly he focuses on the “social dimension of personal revelation. . . . Experience and narrative are drawn together in a complex relationship guided by the abilities of the human mind to comprehend the divine; the communicative abilities to express the ambiguous, the visceral, and the spiritual; and the cultural norms and expectations for narrative, performance, and the construction of social identity” (381).

This is a fancy way of saying Mould explores Mormon beliefs and values by paying attention to the stories Mormons tell each other about what God tells them, and the contexts in which they tell these stories. Mould analyzes narratives from official Church publications (from the *Ensign* and *Preach My Gospel* all the way back to the *Juvenile Instructor*), diaries, and the extensive Mormon folklore archives at Brigham Young University and Utah State University.⁵ More prominently, Mould includes transcripts of personal interviews he conducted, personal notes taken during sacrament meeting talks, and a host of other sources he personally gathered.

II. Overview and Truth Claims

Chapter one will give outsiders an accurate picture of Mormonism's personal revelation in broad strokes—what it is, who expects it, when, and why. Chapter two discusses “performance norms,” or the informal rules about how and when members of the Church share stories (60). This chapter has important implications for the ways that context helps shape narratives—a story shared in a testimony meeting or in a missionary discussion will often differ from the way that same story is shared among close friends and family. Chapter three shifts to the “formal qualities” of personal revelation stories, as Mould develops a typology of prescriptive (solicited and unsolicited) and descriptive revelation. Here he delves into how cultural expectations can shape the ways Mormons actually experience revelation, as well as the ways Mormons relate such experiences to others (137). Chapter four lists the “building blocks of the narrative tradition,” which are common motifs that crop up in the stories shared in sacrament meetings and Sunday Schools (192). Chapter five focuses more broadly on the “echoes of culture” heard in the stories—the recurring themes the stories often revolve around, which include domestic life and church work (242). Mould discusses ways that region and era, age and gender impact the stories. He finds, for instance, that women are much more likely than men to relate stories of being prompted to protect children in the domestic sphere, whereas men are much more likely to receive revelation on the location of a new home or employment (261-288; see also 316, 353, 420), discoveries which follow typical gender role expectations. Chapter six is unique in terms of what typically receives attention in folklore studies. Rather than paying exclusive attention to oral contexts, Mould recognizes the need to discuss the relationship between written texts and oral story-telling (327). His rhetorical analysis of all twelve issues of the 2007 *Ensign* is fascinating (347, 349, 371).

Mould neither accepts Mormon folktales at face value nor does he dismiss the apparently fantastic (prescient warnings, divine instruction) as beyond the realm of possibility. Instead, he analyzes how culture shapes the stories people tell about revelation. But the question of whether such shaping makes the stories merely natural, purely cultural, or whether they can be considered to be revelation from God is also addressed (139, 149, 185,

196). Mould recognizes the trickiness of analyzing truth claims (321–23, 227, 383). But above all, he is trying to advance “a theory of interpretation that validates *both* personal experiences *and* shared cultural patterns” (324, emphasis in original). He wants to bracket the truth-claim issue, leaving the reader the space to form a conclusion:

Experience dictates the “data” one can draw upon to narrate, while personal choice guides which of those experiences one chooses to share. Both reflect the hand of God as well as of men and women. Revelatory experiences reflect God’s concerns for people’s well-being as well as people’s own concerns in what they choose to pray about. . . . Analyzing the themes in personal revelation narratives, therefore, can reveal both the intent of God in heaven and the concerns of people on Earth. For LDS members, the former is of greater interest. For the modest scope of this book, it is the latter that takes center stage (243).

There is a bit of blood involved in the dissection here, but Mould wields his scalpel with care using three strategies. First, he consciously distinguishes “temporal” from “spiritual” revelation. The latter bear directly on the truth-claims of LDS doctrinal propositions (a revelation that “the Book of Mormon is true,” for example) while the former deal with all other “facets of life, including daily, ongoing decisions.” If this seems like an easy out for Mould, he argues that “in the folk narrative tradition of personal revelation . . . temporal revelations dominate” (40). Mould still spends a few pages describing conversion narratives and testimonies, but the bulk of the book focuses on the “temporal” (see also 40–5, 244, 328, 383). The index entries listed under “themes in personal revelation narratives” reveal his scope: children, church work, conversion and baptism, danger, death, finding a home, genealogy, guidance finding scripture, guidance speaking, healing, helping others, marriage, missionary work, preparation, spirit children, temple work, travel (447).

For the second strategy, Mould focuses his assessment of personal revelation narratives on the values they communicate, rather than attempting history-focused debunkery. He recognizes that “folklore can distort [values] through accentuation and omission,” but folklore theory finds such distortions relevant in themselves (5). One quick example of how this plays out: Mould

relates the oft-told story of Wilford Woodruff, who was prompted to move the wagon his family was sleeping in during the night. Had he not immediately obeyed, his family would have been destroyed by a fallen tree. Woodruff's account contains elements found in more recent "prompting" stories, including the fact that obedience saved the day. In later iterations of this story, however, a new motif common to other more recent "prompting" stories emerges. Woodruff is depicted as initially hesitant to follow the prompting, waiting until he is prompted multiple times before obeying. Absent from the initial tellings, Mould discovers this new motif is retroactively added by tellers who fill in gaps with their memories and expectations (197–201). Such analysis could help resurrect countless late reminiscences of early Mormon life and leaders from obscurity, as folklore studies works hand-in-hand with historical studies in what one folklorist historian has envisioned as an "age of cooperation" between the two fields.⁶

Third, Mould approaches narratives from an "emic," or insider, perspective (4). He promotes an "experience-centered approach that honors, rather than dismisses, the belief systems under study," and as a non-Mormon, Mould does a remarkable job (6). He is finely attuned to Mormon concepts, repeatedly helping the outsider by providing descriptions of LDS jargon and culture from "greenies," to "the Y," to "pass-along cards," with very few minor flubs. He says D&C 124 was received in 1841 "in the specific context of having to abandon Nauvoo" rather than Missouri (408); conflates the word "atonement" with "repentance and forgiveness" (217); refers to Joseph F. Smith as Joseph Fielding Smith (301), and once refers to "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" as "the Proclamation on Marriage" (261). These nit-picky errors only serve to show how often Mould is right on the emic money; they're the only glaring errors I noticed in the whole book, and they're negligible.

III. Mould for Insiders and Outsiders

Due to this emic approach, Mould's analysis can actually help members of the church better assess the stories they've heard, the stories they tell, and even the ways they experience personal revelation. Mormons will likely be irritated by some of the more fantastical stories, like the MTC trainer who tells about a missionary

who takes a shotgun blast to the chest, only to rise up and convert the would-be murderer who later becomes a stake president “or something like that” (214). They are just as likely to find inspiration, as when the “white-haired sister by the name of Needum” appears in the nick of time to administer a healing blessing to a dying baby, telling the family she’s “been set apart in the temple to bless the sick with her prayers” (217–8). Ultimately, neither faith-promotion nor demotion is Mould’s aim.

He notes one of the biggest benefits of writing as an outsider is the “silent train” phenomenon, whereby insiders might overlook aspects of the culture which are “so normalized that they are ignored” (404). Mould frequently makes the sort of fruitful analysis I’ve come to expect from careful outsiders. One striking example is his likening of family stories to Mormon ritual: “Family stories draw relatives closer together, binding them in story just as sacred temple rites such as sealings and baptisms of the dead bind them in eternity” (330; this idea seems to be implicitly articulated by a church member on 336). Mormons will likely feel at home with the stories he relates, even the cringe-worthy ones (he knows many of us may clench our teeth as little Primary children recite parrot-monies, p. 234).

What about the academic application? He isn’t always as careful to make his jargon understandable to Mormons, who perhaps aren’t his main target audience. Sometimes-pedantic analysis can prompt chuckles: “Dreams and promptings are part of the same revelatory phenomenon. A thrice-repeated revelatory dream is equal to a thrice-repeated prompt” (203). Seeing the process of revelation depicted on Mould’s charts and graphs may seem clinical, but they are useful tools for visual depiction. Some of the charts could even transfer quite easily to Sunday School. His footnotes and appendices and chapter-concluding analyses peppered with folklorist insider-speak all signal that the book is intended for a wider folklore studies audience. He makes important contributions to his field using Mormons as the subject through which broader principles are explored, as when he situates the common appearance of the number three in Mormon narratives with broader Western culture (202–203). In contrast to prior Mormon-themed folklore studies, Mould focuses on the *concept* of personal revelation rather than particular *categories* of lore, like the

Three Nephites or J. Golden Kimball stories. Theme, rather than story type, drives the book (25).

Mould recognizes his book is limited by the relative homogeneity of his sources (9). For lack of space and resources, Mould wasn't able to fully explore variations in "other regions and other countries." He points to a "nascent body of scholarship" trying to pay due attention to these wider contexts and issues a call for more attention to "social, cultural, and religious contexts around the world [in order to] provide a more accurate picture of Mormonism as a global religion" (386). The closest he comes to such analysis are his discussions on the importance of dreams in Latin American Mormon contexts (50). Added to this broader scope would be narratives from other groups including Mormon fundamentalists or the Community of Christ. Still, this is a wonderful first step toward exciting projects to come.

Conclusion

Perhaps the key contribution Mould offers to Mormons themselves is his making of folklore studies immediately relevant to the stories Mormons are still creating rather than focusing only on stories passed down from the nineteenth century. For outsiders and academic folklorists in particular, Mormonism offers Mould a perfect scenario for analyzing the genesis of oral folklore and the transition from the oral to the printed page, as folklore becomes solidified in ink and shaped through the expectations of the recorders (373–75). Finally, all readers can benefit by reflecting on memory itself: from our perception, to our understanding, to our telling and re-telling, to our memory banks, each stage distorts and clarifies the truth about our history, and thus, the truth about our present (192).

Blair Hodges's interview with Tom Mould is available at
<http://www.fairblog.org/2012/01/24/fair-conversations-episode-14-tom-mould-on-folklore-and-personal-revelation/>

Notes

1. From William A. Wilson, "The Study of Mormon Folklore: An Uncertain Mirror for Truth," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 22 (1989): 95–110.
2. Such folklore, Holland added, "must never be perpetuated." See

excerpts of the transcript at <http://www.pbs.org/mormons/inter-views/holland.html> (accessed April 7, 2012).

3. This distinction is briefly described in *Between Pulpit and Pew: The Supernatural World in Mormon History and Folklore*, edited by W. Paul Reeve and Michael Scott Van Wagenen (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2011).

4. William A. Wilson, "Folklore," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 5 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:518–20, or <http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Folklore> (accessed April 7, 2012).

5. These archival collections are described in William A. Wilson, "Mormon Folklore." *Mormon Americana: A Guide to Sources and Collections in the U. S.* (Provo: BYU Studies, 1995), 437–54.

6. Peter Burke's historiographical survey of history and folklore studies outlines an early "age of harmony" (ca.. 1846–1920s), an "age of suspicion" (apx. 1920s–1970s), and an "age of rapprochement" (ca.. 1970s to 2000s). See Burke, "History and Folklore: A Historiographical Survey," *Folklore* vol. 115, no. 2 (Aug. 2004): 133–39. In addition to Reeve's edited collection, Brant A. Gardner fruitfully uses folklore theory to analyze the statements of witnesses to Joseph Smith's Book of Mormon translation. See *The Gift and the Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011).

Faith and Doubt in the First-Person Singular

Therese Doucet. *A Lost Argument: A Latter-Day Novel*. Washington, DC: Strange Violin Editions, 2011. 254 pp. \$14.00. ISBN: 978-0-9837484-1-0

Why I Stay: The Challenges of Discipleship for Contemporary Mormons, edited by Robert Ress. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2011. 199 pp. \$24.95. ISBN: 978-1-56085-213-1

Thomas Riskas. *Deconstructing Mormonism: An Analysis and Assessment of the Mormon Faith*. Cranford, N.J.: American Atheist Press, 2011. 480 pp. \$29.95. ISBN: 978-1-57884-007-6

Reviewed by Rosalynde Welch

In 1979, Mary Bradford published in these pages an important personal essay on personal essays. Titled "I, Eye, Aye," the piece

first outlines a brief history of the genre within Mormon letters and then offers its memorable and enduringly useful analytical triptych: the Mormon first-person, as it was emerging among the essayists flourishing at the time, is characterized by its firmly personal point of view, the “I”; by its cultural work of observation, the “eye”; and by its ultimately affirmative and redemptive perspective, the “aye.”

I want to borrow Bradford’s framework and put it to what may seem at first a strange and inapt use: to make sense of three recent books on Mormonism, each of which comes to grips with the Mormon first-person voice in a different way. Only one of the three is a volume of personal essays in the sense that Bradford had in mind; the second is a novel, partly written in first-person diary form; and the third is a dense academic work framed by a personal narrative of disillusionment, an anti-testimony. It is admittedly a strain to yoke these three odd and unlike specimens into Bradford’s homophonic schema, but I think that together they can tell us something about how the Mormon first-person has evolved over the past thirty years, and what kind of work it does in this age of faith, doubt and blogging.

* * *

Mary Bradford’s first category is “I”: the first-person voice in all its vulnerability, idiosyncrasy, and bias, let loose to romp or rant among the paragraphs of a personal essay. Signature’s new collection *Why I Stay: The Challenges of Discipleship for Contemporary Mormons* is a solid example of the personal essay form as Bradford understood it, celebrated it and indeed helped to define in these pages. The essays in *Why I Stay* originated as presentations at the “Why I Stay” sessions of the annual Sunstone Symposium during the past decade, and most of the names in the table of contents will be familiar to readers of this journal. The contributors for the most part represent a mature generation of liberal Mormons, those who were present at the foundation of Dialogue and Sunstone during the tumultuous 1960s and who deeply absorbed the lessons and ethos of the civil rights movement. They have brought that set of critical sensibilities and social commitments to bear on church culture and structure for almost five decades now.

There are no great surprises within the pages of this volume, and the dominant themes of doubt and faith, questioning and obedience, disappointment and commitment will be familiar to any Latter-day Saint who has followed the development of serious Mormon thought, first in academic journals and now extended into the electronic realm of Mormon blogs. Each essay grapples with the titular question—why stay committed to the church despite political, spiritual, or social differences—and each essayist lays out his or her personal grounds, sometimes as personal reminiscence and sometimes as formal justification. A shared sense of commitment, chagrin, and grounded hope defines the mood of the collection, and it's one that I find tremendously appealing.

The answers to the question implied in the title fall into three rough categories, and following Bradford's lead we might make another triptych analysis, just for fun. One category is what we might call a "Positive" commitment to Mormon ideas, "positive" in the epistemological rather than affective sense. These authors do not profess certainty about every LDS belief—on the contrary, they freely express skepticism about some teachings—but they offer at least some form of positive belief as a primary reason for their staying. In this category we find folks like Bill Russell and Greg Prince, who writes in his essay "I Trust the Data":

I can summarize my encounter with Mormonism in four words: "Go with the data." If a question is susceptible to examination, I want to make sure for myself that the data are solid. Then I go with the facts. If it is something that cannot be measured and tested, I am willing to accept it as a matter of faith and be content with it. This approach has not failed me. (94)

This category tends to attract the reformers and the idealists, those who embrace the optimistic and revolutionary elements of the Mormon cosmos and who work for what they see as the natural extension of those precepts into all elements of LDS sociality. Robert Rees is the paradigmatic specimen here:

I stay in the Church because I want to be part of the spiritual and social revolution that began when Joseph Smith knelt in the grove to trees near Palmyra. . . . I sincerely believe the Lord wants his Church to be better than it is, and I have the hope that I may play some small part in making it so. (184)

Another category is what I've called an "Appreciative" attachment to Mormonism, those Saints who love the rich history of the institution, its meaning in American history and its powerful, complicated legacy, while offering a critical perspective on contemporary Mormon culture and politics. The incomparable Claudia Bushman puts it humorously in her essay "Everything I Ever Needed to Know I Learned in Church":

We are fortunate to have such an interesting Church structure, such colorful doctrines, such tortured relationships with other Churches and individuals. . . . I am so glad not to be anything ordinary in the religious line, but to have a history, beliefs, and activities that leave others incredulous, amazed, horrified, bewildered. (36)

Appreciative Saints love the community offered by the Church, the support for families, and the structure in place to form loving relationships of mutual obligation.

Finally, there are those who claim a "Constitutive" relationship to the Church. These folks may doubt the Church's doctrines, cringe at its history, reject its politics, and dislike its community culture. But they are Mormon at the bone, and they can't change that even if they wanted to. In Lavina Fielding Anderson's extraordinary case, the Church has actively disclaimed her through excommunication, but she continues to attend services because, as she puts it, "The Church had power over my membership but does not have power over my Mormonness, which I continue to claim as my own destiny" (89). Karen Rosenbaum strikes a more melancholy note in her sensitive essay "How Frail a Foundation":

Many of my friends have made the leap out of Mormonism— but I suspect I cannot change my Mormonness. As long as I have a mind, Mormon hymns will run through it. I cannot erase them— even those I don't like. (159)

Positive, appreciative, and constitutive: chances are that each of these modes of attachment is present in every member's relationship to the Church in some degree. *Why I Stay* offers a local habitation and a name, in the form of personal perspectives and narratives, for readers working to define and understand their own relationships to the institution that binds us together.

* * *

It's tempting to imagine a scene in which author Therese Doucet pitches her novel, *A Lost Argument*, to a publishing executive: "It's My Name is Charlotte Simmons meets Plato's *Phaedrus* meets NBC's *Community* meets bodice ripper romance novel. What's not to love?" As it happened, Doucet self-published the novel under her own imprint, Strange Violins Editions; such a meeting never occurred, one presumes. But the novel itself is indeed as quirky an amalgam of themes and styles as the imagined pitch suggests.

The novel is set about twenty years ago in what now seems like an impossibly old-fashioned college scene. Nary a cell phone nor even a personal computer darkens the narrative door; characters communicate via long letters, land lines, and answering machines. Quaintest of all, the story is driven by college students' quest not for hook-up sex but for true love, though it does include several gratuitous and awkwardly-rendered scenes of libidinous fumbling. Heavy petting among college students rarely wins style points.

Doucet manipulates the novel's narrative voice in ways that are not entirely scrutable to this reader, ways that both evoke and deflect the ethos of the "I" in Bradford's trio. The first half of the story is told in a conventional third-person limited-omniscient voice, with occasional inconsistencies in the omniscient consciousness. The second half of the novel is written in first-person—indeed, in diary form, the very first person—with a single extended irruption of third-person prose that occurs suddenly and without explanation.

Throughout, the protagonist, the figure whom Bradford would recognize as the "eye" of the story, is a figure familiar from chick lit: Marguerite Farnsworth is shy, bookish and flat-chested, but she nevertheless manages to capture the sexual imagination of attractive male atheist philosophers wherever she goes. Prone to depression, self-doubt and consuming romantic fantasy, Marguerite falls prey to serial infatuations over the course of the novel, and these personal misadventures form the spine of the episodic plot. In the first half, Marguerite attempts and fails to convert her philosopher-crush to Mormonism, and in the second half

Marguerite herself loses faith in Mormonism as she flounders through a series of doomed relationships and failed philosophical inquiries. Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Socrates, and Levinas are as present to Marguerite as John, Zach, Matthew, and Josh, and her relationship to them just as obsessive. The themes of the novel are thus eros, philosophy, and doubt.

The novel suffers from a humdrum style and a sketchy plot, and the author labors toward a somewhat ponderous unification of its erotic plot and its philosophical themes into a notion that she calls “philosophical eros.” This epistemological erotics likens the pleasure of the self helpless against the force of an erotic infatuation with the pleasure of the mind seized by an inescapable idea. But it is pain as much as pleasure, for the lover is ultimately left alone, unfulfilled and incapable of fulfillment.

My argument was that Socratic philosophical eros is tragic because of its limitations. The lust of knowledge, certainty and beauty can never be satisfied, yet wonder’s embrace leaves the Socratic lover too full to accept any imperfect, mortal love. The Socratic lover loves beauty and wisdom because he lacks them, and can’t let himself be loved in the fragile, contingent way of things that are real because he’s too enamored of the ideal. (192)

It is too rarefied a notion to support the fleshy demands of realistic fiction, and ultimately the novel, like Plato’s unlucky charioteers, fails to achieve flight.

If its central conceit founders, the novel nevertheless makes several stimulating observations about the function of doubt in LDS life. The most illuminating to me is the question of when faith crises occur in a typical LDS coming-of-age. The timing, it turns out, can determine the course that the rest of a life follows. At one point in the story, Marguerite has realized, not for the first time and not for the last, that she does not have a testimony.

She knew what it meant. . . . It meant she couldn’t serve a mission, couldn’t go to the temple, couldn’t bear her testimony in sacrament meeting. These things required a certainty she didn’t have. . . . And she would have to be alone, eternally alone. No faithful man would want to be with an outcast, and no unbeliever would have the patience to wait for her while she waited for God. (203)

Had Marguerite’s faith reached a crisis several years later, after she had served a mission, been endowed, and perhaps mar-

ried in the temple, she would be much more likely to find a way to remain connected to the community, though with her faith in a very different form than it once took. Indeed, the novel illustrates clearly that an unmarried college-age woman, not holding the priesthood and not having served a mission, is more or less structurally uninvested in the Church, tied only by affective bonds of family or faith—though these can certainly be very strong. If those affective bonds weaken, however, as they do for Marguerite, there is little to keep young adult women invested. If temple marriage represents the first major buy-in to full adult Church membership for young adult women, as it has for most LDS women in the past, and if the age of marriage continues to drift upward, young Mormon women will remain effectively uninvested in the institutional church during long periods of crucial identity-formation. Perhaps this will change with the younger missionary age for women. After the load-bearing walls of a life are erected, the structure is much less likely to shift. But if the crisis occurs before those formative experiences and primary relationships are in place, in high school or in college, it's much more likely that the young adult will simply drift away.

This observation calls into question the recommendation—which I have made myself—that we “inoculate” our teenagers and young adults against doubt by deliberately exposing them to challenging elements of our history and teaching. If the primary goal is pragmatic, to retain our young people in the fold—rather than, say, to promote openness and transparency for its own sake—then perhaps the vulnerable years of young adulthood are not the ideal time to disrupt their faith, even if we feel it is ultimately for their own spiritual benefit. At the very least, the novel shows that shocks to a naïve faith, while necessary for the formation of a mature spirituality, must be adequately supported by family and ecclesiastical networks. Marguerite's family and bishop are entirely uninvolved in the catastrophes that beset her spiritual life; she finds some support in a sympathetic philosophy professor, but for the most part she muddles through alone with her diary and her philosophy volumes. While the dialectical inflection of Marguerite's exit is unusual, her anguished progress out of the Church is all too common.

* * *

Bradford connects her final category, the aye-saying essay, with the long rhetorical tradition of testimony within Mormonism, a deeply personal, generally brief affirmation of shared beliefs. Thomas Riskas's massive academic tome, *Deconstructing Mormonism: An Analysis and Assessment of the Mormon Faith*, thus seems an odd entry in the aye-saying category: it's an exhaustingly abstract, abstrusely exhaustive, and relentlessly negative treatment of virtually every tenet of Mormon teaching. Indeed, it's 450 pages of pure anti-testimony. Like the starlet sang about rehab, Riskas says no, no, no.

The argument is a "deconstruction" only in the loosest sense of the word: it shares with the literary critical method of that name only a deliberately crabbed, arduous style. It could only have been a labor of love or obsession to write, and it's difficult to imagine what could induce anybody to read it. Riskas cobbles his analytical method together with assorted ideas from psychology, philosophy, empiricism, and continental critical theory, without apparent regard to the ways in which these vocabularies contradict one another. He relies, for example, on a notion of "common sense" that works within an empirical framework but that is reduced to hash when he adopts the language of high critical theory.

Riskas presents his meta-claim thus:

The central analytical argument of this book, viz., that beyond its limited boundaries as a life-form, the Mormon faith (like all other theistic faiths)—because it is an entirely language-dependent belief system intended to be regarded as literally and objectively true—is conceptually problematic and therefore deeply problematic, if not utterly false and incoherent at its metaphysical core. (39)

His argument for this claim largely boils down to two observations: first, that by assuming the existence of God as a given, typical formulations of LDS truth claims rely on a kind of question begging; and that propositional claims must be both conceptually justifiable and empirically justified in order to claim legitimacy. Unsurprisingly, he finds that LDS teachings fail on both counts. These criticisms are hardly novel for Latter-day Saints who have given any sustained attention to the foundations of

their personal faith. That faith is both unjustified and in an important sense unjustifiable—and that its existential power lies precisely in this defenselessness—has been a familiar idea since Kierkegaard.

Riskas is as unironical as he is dogged, and he would rightly point out that the irony I am about to extract from his book is entirely beside the point. Nevertheless, what I enjoyed about his project, and the reason I've chosen to link it to Bradford's testimony category, is the extent to which he unconsciously replicates the distinctive tics of Mormon faith talk. His style is excruciatingly repetitive, "in the service of necessary redundancy," he says, and in the precise manner of the Book of Mormon's numbing repetition (373). He rails against unfalsifiable faith claims, yet his own arguments are themselves impervious to counter evidence as he spins alternative scenarios to explain away virtually any response—even if, as he suggests, the true effects of his claims on devout believers will "very likely take place beneath the surface of awareness." (39) He brings an apocalyptic urgency to his claims, seeing in Mormonism a threat to "scientific progress and personal and social well-being, if not our very existence as a human race." (381) He is fixated on a naïve notion of choice.

Above all, he imports a distinctively Mormon certainty into his language, along the lines of an LDS testimony's litany of "I know" statements. The prose is littered with "surely," "clearly" and other adverbial signals of certitude. He issues an "invitation and challenge" to his devout readers to undertake what he calls the "Outsider Test of Faith": a serious investigation of Mormon truth claims with a presumption of skepticism, an evaluation of faith as from the outside through the lens of incredulity. This is, delightfully, almost a perfect negative of Moroni's invitation at the end of the Book of Mormon, charging the reader to examine these things with a presumption of truth. Both tests are, of course, hopelessly rigged from the beginning, and fundamentally unsound as empirical means of finding truth. But they are fantastically effective at magnifying and confirming emotional affiliations. In the devout Mormon's view, Moroni's invitation cannot fail to yield an affirmative result to the sincere seeker. In Riskas's view, the Outsider Test cannot fail to yield a negative result. If it

should fail, however, one may rest assured that it is very likely working beneath the surface of awareness.

* * *

On its own, none of these three books is likely to claim history's notice in the long view of Mormon letters; one is too warmed over, one too outlandish and shaky in its style, and one is simply a miscarriage of argument. Taken together, though, these three books make something more than a sum of parts. These new books bring tidings from the first person in a twenty-first century landscape of doubt and belief. When Bradford wrote her essay in 1978, the "I" already stood athwart a long and winding rhetorical history. With a taproot in Christian confessional practices, developed and refined in Augustine's *Confessions*, implicated in Reformation-era social disruptions around private conscience, harnessed as an engine of enlightenment liberalism, and appropriated by the emerging forms of the novel and capital-A Art, the first person arrived in the modern world with a chip on his shoulder, itching for a fight with authority, institution, and tradition. The rhetorical "I" carries with it a whole host of contested assumptions about the sovereignty of the individual in the private sphere, the legitimacy of first-person experience vis-à-vis empirical knowledge and traditional wisdom, and the aesthetic privilege of the individual artistic sensibility.

Two decades after Bradford wrote her 1978 essay, the world saw an explosive invasion of the first-person perspective into public discourse in the form of blogging and personal electronic publishing of all stripes. Where the public first-person was once largely confined to opinion pages and literature, the "I" has busted out in a big way: millions of words of personal narrative, personal opinion, and personal history are available literally at one's fingertips at any given moment. Many days, my own media diet consists largely of first-person writing.

The LDS Church has been prompt in the twenty-first century to embrace this cultural shift toward the individual voice, most recently in its "I'm a Mormon" advertising campaign, which features individual Mormons offering their personal identities and perspectives as rhetorical down payment on the farm: "And I'm a

Mormon.” A related website allows individual members to upload profiles and share their personal answers to spiritual questions. This can be seen as a natural development from native LDS beliefs about the eternal nature of the personality, an ethos of individualism fired in early Mormon traumas, and our textual traditions of first-person journals and testimonies.

What effect has this triumph of the first-person had on Mormon letters? Does the ubiquity of self-expression on the internet legitimize or cheapen the “I”? Personal expression may be more widely accepted as cultural currency—we now find it entirely normal to address knotty philosophical and moral questions in public debate by way of personal expression rather than formal argument, for example—but is it simultaneously less valued? After all, personal views on faith, doubt and anything in between are a dime a dozen, with poor grammar and misspellings thrown in for free.

Our eccentric trio of texts may bring tidings from both the rear and the vanguard of this first-person offensive. *Why I Stay* represents a baseline measure for the cultural work of the “I” in mid-century Mormonism, reflecting as it does a mature generation of Latter-day Saints. During what may have been the apogee of the first-person’s cultural prestige, mid-century personal discourse possessed both the authenticity to express affirmative faith and the authority to express unorthodox doubt, the confidence to challenge official discourse. By contrast, Riskas’s *Deconstructing Mormonism*, in its blundering and bludgeoning way, registers the assaults on the confidence and authority of the first-person brought in the intervening years by neuroscience, psychology, and critical theory: Riskas’s tome echoes, often incoherently, the challenges to notions of free will, human rationality, and altruism that science and philosophy have leveled against the foundations of liberal individualism over the past two decades.

Doucet’s *A Lost Argument* offers the most interesting brief on the present state of the Mormon first-person as the work of a young novelist coming into her professional life in the internet age. The novel approaches the problem of the “I” obliquely, through shifts in its narrative discourse at key moments in the psychological action. The most abrupt of these shifts occurs in chap-

ter 22, in which the protagonist Marguerite, in the midst of spiritual crisis, climbs a mountain and petitions God for a revelation. No theophany ensues. The disillusionment that follows is itself predictable; these days, blogs have made de-conversion narratives as familiar a species as conversion stories. What is interesting in this passage, though, is the sudden switch away from the intimate diary form of the surrounding chapters—an informal personal voice that would be very much at home, in both tone and content, in *Why I Stay*—to a flat, limited-omniscient third-person discourse. The protagonist's spiritual climax is not rendered in her own voice; indeed one begins to realize that in the world of this novel, spiritual seeking cannot be rendered in the first-person. For Doucet, it turns out, the first-person can only voice doubt, never faith.

Why this is so is the critic's privilege to surmise. My favored explanation is that the ubiquity of personal discourse online has undermined the prestige and authenticity of the first-person, especially when the theme is conventional or affirmative, leaving it suitable only for the blogging hoi polloi and entirely too cheap for the literary novelist. To retain the critical authority of the first person, the artist must flee to ever more challenging territory—doubt, transgression, rupture. The aesthetic results for literary fiction are often dismaying, ghettoized and irrelevant. This, of course, is a well-worn cultural path, long pre-dating the blogging revolution, pre-dating even the 1960s marriage of counterculture with mainstream, marketed cool. In this sense, the crisis of the first person shapes not only Doucet's novel but also the personal voices in *Why I Stay* and Riskas's undergirding authorial presence: for all their differences, these writers came of age in or around the 1960s, their adult personas shaped by that decade's valorizing of the transgressor and the outsider; the notion of the brave, lonely voice for truth continues to operate at some level in their writing. Indeed, Riskas's outsider status is virtually his only claim on our interest.

The primary generational difference traced by our motley trilogy, then, is not merely an obsession with virtuous doubt; this has been a leitmotif of literary culture, including Mormon literary culture, for several generations now. The difference may be, if

our sample is representative, in the diminished authority of the first person for elite writers. An analogous trajectory in American literature might be drawn between, say, J. D. Salinger and David Foster Wallace: each an iconic elite artist of his time, the first leveraging the prestige of the outsider first-person, both in his most famous novel and in his reclusive persona, and the latter ruthlessly destabilizing every formal and philosophical assumption beneath the authorial “I.”

Does Doucet in fact represent a larger flight in Mormon letters away from the affirmative first person, a reaction to the ubiquity of the first person in mainstream culture? On this question it is the critic’s privilege to demur. If she does indeed represent the vanguard of such a flight, I cannot resist a bit of advice for our Mormon literary artists: if the “I, eye, and aye” of Bradford’s confident, critical, and ultimately affirmative first-person singular is to be abandoned or attenuated, find a new narrative vehicle from within the rich cultural resources of our own history and tradition. A fine example of this kind of culturally-specific narrative experimentation is Steven Peck’s 2011 novel *The Scholar of Moab*. (Coincidentally, Peck’s second novel, *A Short Stay in Hell*, was published by Doucet’s imprint, Strange Violin, in 2012.) Peck’s *Scholar* draws on Mormon diary culture, southern Utah regionalism, and our conflicted traditions of individualism and collectivism to create a wonderfully strange, deeply philosophical narrative that interrogates the nature of the first person. My own vote for a fresh narrative vehicle in Mormon letters is the first-person plural, the “we” at the center of our prayer language, our communitarian legacy, our most beloved hymns. The first-person plural would provide the artist with a medium for formal experimentation while retaining a connection to native Mormon culture. There’s more to be discovered about faith and doubt than that lonely first-person singular can accomplish on its own.

The Cultural Contexts of Mormonism

Kim Östman, *The Introduction of Mormonism to Finnish Society*,

1840–1900. (Åbo Akademi University Press, 2010). 486pp. €32
ISBN: 978-951-765-552-1

Reviewed by Mark Kilmer

I moved from the United States to Finland a decade ago, and in the midst of a good deal of culture shock, I found comfort in what I perceived as the uniformity of Mormonism. I sat in my new ward for the first Sunday and thought what so many Mormons abroad have thought before and since: Mormonism seems so familiar in its liturgy (or lack thereof) and its general expectations. Over time, as I participated in the ward more and got to know members better, I discovered subtle differences in the Mormon experience here, and likewise in the years I lived in London; nothing of the magnitude of the often-feared candles on the sacrament table, but more in the emphasis or lack of emphasis put on certain doctrines and the tone of conversations and lessons. Mormonism as a correlated, hierarchical system is fairly uniform, but the cultural context in which Mormonism exists creates subtle differences. However, those differences in the Mormon experience based on context rarely receive serious examination.

Kim Östman's *The Introduction of Mormonism to Finnish Society, 1840–1900*, is a historical examination of the interaction of a specific cultural context and Mormonism, which itself developed out of a social and political context significantly different from Finland's, especially in regard to the role of religion in society. Östman focuses on an obscure moment in the history of both Finnish religious life and Mormon missionary efforts. During the years of his study, Finland boasted seventy-seven converts, nearly all of them belonging to the Swedish-speaking minority. Fourteen of them emigrated to Utah and twenty-eight were excommunicated. The Mormon presence in Finland remained negligible between 1900 and 1946, when a sustained missionary presence began. Thus in many ways this story is that of a dead end for Mormonism, a look at a half-hearted effort to establish the church in a culture that did not welcome it.

It is this interaction between Finnish culture and Mormonism in which Östman is principally interested. Why was the success of the church in Finland so limited compared to other Nordic coun-

tries, especially Denmark and Sweden.² After laying out his theoretical background, Östman begins with a review of Mormon history and doctrine through the nineteenth century, including the especially relevant topics of the rise and fall of plural marriage and the Utah War. He gives special attention to Mormon perceptions of other Christians, boundary maintenance, and the structure of early missionary work generally and in Scandinavia specifically. He then examines the religious culture of Finland in the late nineteenth century, especially the role of the state-sponsored churches and the presence of other religions during the period. (Finland was at that time in the process of transitioning from a strictly monoreligious, Lutheran society to one where various religions were allowed to exist but not to proselytize; this shift is related to and in some ways a result of Finland becoming a largely autonomous part of the Russian empire.)

In many ways, the core of the book is a comprehensive examination of how Mormons were portrayed in print, both in domestic newspapers and periodicals and imported, translated novels and travel narratives. These sources range from the journalistic to the sensational, and Östman ties the frequency and content of these texts to developments of Mormonism, which have clearly not gone unnoticed. He then traces the specific activities of Mormon missionaries sent from Sweden and the Finnish reaction to them, including a fascinating case study centered around the town of Pohja in southern Finland, in which a member from Sweden was sent as a missionary, converted a few of his neighbors, and was prosecuted and jailed for doing so.

Two aspects of Östman's work make it significant. First, the examination of cultural context as a means of understanding how Mormonism takes shape in a specific location is important research. My general sense is that this type of research has been growing, but centers largely around the foundational moments of the church rather than the diversification of Mormon experience, which is institutionally more tolerated than celebrated. More of this type of research would be valuable for Mormon studies, including contemporary studies as well as the historical work. In the long run, it might even encourage more local autonomy in global Mormonism.

Just as significant is the existence of a study of Finnish Mor-

monism researched and published by a Finnish Mormon reflecting an understanding of both cultures. Östman grew up as a Finnish Mormon, served as a missionary in Great Britain, and is fluent in Finnish, Swedish and English, the languages of his research. He is also a founding member of the European Mormon Studies Association, which holds an annual conference and publishes *The International Journal of Mormon Studies*. As Mormonism increases in its global reach, Mormon studies as a field could better represent that growth through more local organizations for Mormon studies like EMSA and more activity by local scholars around the world. However, Mormon studies research requires a visit to the LDS church archives because of the centralization of historical documents early in the twentieth century. That centralization was significant in preserving historical data, but it has probably limited the ability for local historians to operate without a trip to Salt Lake City or a proxy there to assist him or her.

Even though Östman's study focuses on a remote moment in Mormonism, I found it relevant to my current Mormon experience in Finland. Several years ago, I went to Helsinki's largest bookstore and, inspired by a blog post, decided to see what books they had about Mormonism. The religions section had no books in any languages that featured Mormonism, and so I asked a salesperson. After consulting her computer, she guided me to the American shelf of the geography section, where I found Krakauer's *Under the Banner of Heaven* and *Escape* by Carolyn Jessop. That was it. I recalled that incident while reading *The Introduction of Mormonism to Finnish Society, 1840–1900*, and it struck me that surprisingly little has changed.

To the Edges of Modern Life

Hugh J. Cannon. *To the Peripheries of Mormondom*, edited by Reid Neilson. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011. 336 pp. Cloth: \$29.95. ISBN: 978-1607810100

Reviewed by Erica Eastley

On December 4, 1920, apostles David O. McKay and Hugh J. Can-

non set off on an around-the-world journey to visit every mission in the world and some of the most isolated congregations of the church. They spent a year traveling the world, seeing for themselves the realities of life for many Mormons, especially those on the edges of the Church, and often, from the missionaries' perspectives, the edges of modern life.

Cannon wrote an account of that journey and had it nearly ready to publish when he died unexpectedly in 1931. His wife, Sarah Richards Cannon, tried to have the manuscript published in 1951, but a series of miscommunications and rejections kept the book from being published until 2005, when it was finally released by Spring Creek Book Company as *David O. McKay Around the World: An Apostolic Mission*. I read that 2005 edition not long after it was published and enjoyed it, but also wished for more background information. My wish was fulfilled with this new book edited by Reid Neilson, where he provides significantly more context and important historical detail to Cannon's account.

Neilson identifies nearly all of the people and places mentioned in the manuscript and adds many details garnered from additional sources about the journey, especially Cannon's letters home, which were published by the *Deseret News* during the trip, and McKay's personal diaries from that time. There are also thirty pages of photographs which Neilson discovered in the Church History Library and sixty pages of annotations. Finally, the excellent bibliography and several useful appendices provide important details about the history of the missions visited.

One of Neilson's valuable contributions to the historical background of McKay's tour is his suggestion that Joseph H. Stimpson, an early mission president in Japan, played a significant role in instigating the journey. Stimpson had been president of the Japan mission for five years by 1920, with almost no support from or even contact with Salt Lake. He had written again and again over the years, asking for more missionaries and for clarification about rumors that the mission would be closed, and pleading for a general authority visit. At the end of 1920 Stimpson's persistence seems to have paid off when McKay was assigned to visit the Japanese mission, along with all the other missions of the Church.

Despite Neilson's additions and contextualization, the focus of the book is Cannon's account and approximately half of the

336 pages is Cannon's words. The narrative generally has a breezy tone, describing the people and places he sees as much as detailing a religious journey. He spends a lot of time on seasickness and travel difficulties and can't seem to help boasting a bit about his own good health throughout the journey. Cannon's intended audience was faithful members of the church, particularly those in Utah, and one goal was to help those members visualize the peripheries of Mormondom. It's unfortunate the manuscript was never published for that audience.

As expected from a book written in the 1920s, there is plenty of dated language. The "natives" are usually described as "child-like" and "dark-skinned," while the wives of the mission presidents are "hospitable" and "industrious gems." There is plenty of astonishment at all the new things they see, but there are several times when Cannon finds practices that "seem peculiar or even ridiculous to us [which] might be imitated with profit." I'd be interested to know if McKay or Cannon changed any of their habits based on their travels.

My favorite parts of the book were descriptions of how the church actually worked in different places at that time. One of the best was an account by McKay of the Hui Tau, an annual mission conference in New Zealand. Instead of a Utah-style meeting, we read about a local interpretation of a huge Mormon meeting. This wasn't a typical conference, but instead a several-day gathering with plenty of food, dancing, singing, prayer, and gospel discussion. Both McKay and Cannon write quite a bit about the *hongi*, a traditional Maori greeting that made them feel "that their noses had been pressed quite out of shape." McKay also provides detail about how the conference was organized and closes his account of the Hui Tau with these words: "Success and long life to the 'Hui Tau'! May each succeeding one be more successful than the last!"

There were several times when McKay's version of events, found in Neilson's endnotes, puts a different light on Cannon's account. For example, the discovery of a piece of lost luggage was a faith-promoting story for one man, but not necessarily for the other. Cannon also recounts an older, miraculous story of his father, George Q. Cannon, which likely never happened or was embellished.

But despite his exaggerations, it cannot be denied that Cannon was a thorough record-keeper. He records vivid descriptions of his reactions to RLDS missionaries; a trip to the Taj Mahal, Egypt, and Jerusalem; a visit to the Armenian mission; a missing mission president; stories about faithful members; miraculous meetings; canceling a visit to an extremely isolated member; and many stories about sacrifice. While the book can be read as a travelogue, there is plenty for the historian in this edition. For me, though, the most memorable parts of the book were where Cannon writes about the people on the edges of the church, especially since I've lived on the current geographical edges of the church myself for several years in Central Asia and the Middle East. It is the members, no matter where they are, who make the church what it is, but nowhere is that more apparent than in places like Irbid, Jordan, or Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

McKay and Cannon experienced, however briefly, a taste of lived Mormonism that is the reality for many members of the church. They spent a huge amount of time traveling and trying to communicate in many parts of the world. Although it is potentially much easier for leaders to visit or contact isolated members today, sometimes those quick flights and brief email obscure leaders' views of real life on the peripheries, especially if they don't speak the local languages. It also seems the same sort of persistence that Stimpson used in getting McKay to Japan is still needed today to make sure members have access to their leaders.

After reading the account's dated language, I also wondered what parts of our current language usage will look dated in fifty or one hundred years. Our current church peripheries are largely made up of the Muslim world, although of course not entirely, and just as our language about "the natives" has changed, I hope the way we talk about Muslims and Islam will have changed, and our perceptions of people from Muslim countries.

To the Peripheries of Mormondom is an engaging travelogue and it provides a rare glimpse of the church in 1921. More importantly, though, it offers insights into lessons we are still learning in the Church, and problems that will continue to challenge the institution and its leadership in the twenty-first century.

A Big Task for a Small Book

Paul C. Gutjahr. *The Book of Mormon: A Biography*. Princeton University Press, 2012. 280 pp. Cloth: \$24.95. ISBN 978-0-69114-480-1

Reviewed by Michael Austin

Paul Gutjahr's *The Book of Mormon: A Biography* is one of the inaugural offerings from Princeton University Press's *Lives of Great Religious Books*—a series that proposes a new lens for studying major religious texts such as the *I-Ching*, the *Confessions of St. Augustine*, and the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The books in this series move away from the textual analysis and explication normally found in scholarly monographs and focus instead on the reception of sacred works. “Written for general readers by leading authors and experts,” the Press advertises, “these books examine the historical origins of texts from the great religious traditions, and trace how their reception, interpretation, and influence have changed—often radically—over time.”

Paul C. Gutjahr is an excellent choice to treat the Book of Mormon in this series. Though not well known in Mormon circles, Gutjahr is a pioneer in the field of “History of the Book” studies, an academic specialty that studies how texts function within the societies that produce and consume them. In previous books, Gutjahr has examined how both the Bible and popular literature functioned in nineteenth-century America, so he comes to the current project with a deep knowledge of nineteenth-century print culture, especially as it applies to religious texts. This background is well suited for analyzing the Book of Mormon's reception, and it allows for some unexpected insights into the history of the text.

Most of these insights involve the way the Book of Mormon has evolved over the past 180 years, both as a physical text and as a cultural object. Gutjahr painstakingly documents the formatting changes between 1830 and 1920 that created the Book of Mormon as we know it today. These changes standardized the language, shortened the paragraphs, added verse numbers, and presented the text in two columns per page, transforming it from

something that “read more like a novel or historical work” to a book that “took on the air of a sacred, biblical text” (96–97). He also analyzes the illustrations by George Reynolds, Minerva Teichert, and Arnold Friberg that have become part of the Book of Mormon’s extended text. And he provides exceptional insights into the challenges posed by translation—the need to preserve the core meaning of the text while remaining sensitive to different cultures and shifting perceptions. I did not know until I read the book, for example, that the Church prints all Japanese copies of the Book of Mormon on cream-colored paper because white is associated with death in that culture, or that LDS graphic designers had to create a new, 20,000-character font in order to publish the Book of Mormon in Urdu.

More important than the shifts in the book’s appearance are the corresponding shifts in its theological role within the LDS Church (and, to a lesser extent, within the RLDS Church/Community of Christ). In the case of the former, Gutjahr demonstrates that LDS theological discourse was essentially biblical from the days of Joseph Smith until the 1980s. This changed radically during the presidency of Ezra Taft Benson. The standard missionary lessons were refashioned to introduce Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon in the first discussion, Church materials began to incorporate Book of Mormon citations where biblical citations had appeared earlier, and Latter-day Saints were exhorted to read the Book of Mormon regularly. Benson, Gutjahr concludes, was “a kind of culminating catalyst whose presidency served as a tipping point within the Church that propelled the Book of Mormon to the forefront of LDS consciousness” (109).

Gutjahr does a good job of incorporating modern scholarship on the Book of Mormon into the narrative of its reception. He shows how the work of such figures as Hugh Nibley and John Sorenson helped to support the Church’s renewed emphasis on the Book of Mormon in the 1980s. At the same time, this scholarly activity led the Church to make the rare concession of backing away, however subtly, from earlier claims about the ancestry of the American Indians. The introduction to the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon, Gutjahr reports, “described the Lamanites as ‘the principal ancestors of the American Indians,’ departing from the Church’s previous, more expansive claim that every Na-

tive American was descended from Lamanite stock” (142-43). Gutjahr ably shows how the early LDS apologetic scholarship blossomed into a much larger academic interest in the book by Mormon and non-Mormon scholars alike—a phenomenon which, he acknowledges, accounts for *The Book of Mormon: A Biography* itself.

Gutjahr does not present himself as a historian of Mormonism, though about the first quarter of his book addresses Joseph Smith and the origin of Mormonism. In recounting the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, Gutjahr relies heavily on Joseph Smith’s own account from the current LDS Pearl of Great Price. He brings in other proposed explanations (such as the Spaulding theory or the single-author theory), but largely, and very appropriately, brackets the question of divine revelation to focus on the text as an unquestionably influential phenomenon. Surprisingly, though, he says very little about what is actually in the Book of Mormon, giving only the briefest summary of its contents in his prologue (7-8). Many of Gutjahr’s readers, of course, will already be familiar with the Book of Mormon; however, a more developed overview would have made *The Book of Mormon: A Biography* more useful for those coming to the book without such content knowledge.

Ultimately, however, it is not Paul Gutjahr’s job to explain what is in the Book of Mormon. And it is certainly not his job to argue for or against its truth or divinity. These are jobs for much longer books, many of which have already been written. Gutjahr, on the other hand, sets out to do something nobody else has ever quite done before: to trace the ways that the reception of the Book of Mormon has evolved over nearly two hundred years and in more than a hundred languages. He takes us from the earliest views of the text as either a divine revelation or a blatant fraud all the way to its recent status as the basis of a hit Broadway musical. This is a big task for a small book, and *The Book of Mormon: A Biography* does it exceptionally well.



Brian Christensen
Recompose, collaborative outdoor
installation with students,
25'x 3'



Brian Christensen
Monument to the Western Landscape,
steel, 78"x 45"x 18"



Brian Christensen
Rozel, basalt on redwood,
58"x 15"x 15"

FROM THE PULPIT

On “Praying with Your Feet”

Geoff Nelson

Editor’s Note: This is a transcription of extemporaneous remarks of President Russell Hancock of the Menlo Park, California Stake Presidency, to the Valparaiso Ward Elders’ Quorum on May 6, 2012. They were recorded and transcribed by Geoff Nelson, and are printed here by permission.

I’m grateful for this invitation to speak to your quorum.

My objective today is to tell you about my faith journey and offer up some observations and possible conclusions. I’m going to speak the only way I know how: honestly and with complete candor. It means making myself vulnerable in front of group I don’t know well (yet), but we think you have a right to know your new stake presidency. If you sustain us as your leaders, then it seems you have a right to know exactly what it is you are sustaining.

So here, for what it’s worth, is my story.

But allow me to preface all of it with this observation: it would appear there are two types of Mormons, or at least two paths to conversion.

One set of members bases their testimony on some sort of sensory encounter which they describe as a burning in the bosom, a witness of the spirit, or some sort of infallible encounter with the Holy Ghost. They might hear a voice, or have a tingling sensation, or find themselves in tears, or some other such sensory experience. Many, many people that I trust and admire describe their witness in these terms, and I believe them. Now, if I’m being completely truthful I will also tell you there are others who speak of this, and I wonder if they are confusing the Holy Ghost with something else, something emotional or intentional or otherwise overwrought. But I have decided never to judge, to accept their claims at face value, and I do not doubt the possibility of such experiences.

The scriptures of course describe this. The most famous instance of it is the promise in the Book of Moroni where we're told to test the gospel and seek a manifestation of the spirit. We're also taught that the manifestation of the spirit will be the Holy Ghost revealing truth to us.

So that is one way of ascertaining truth.

Now here comes the true confession: I've never had it. It has never come to me. That is not how I've obtained my conviction.

Now, for much of my life, especially while praying, this shortcoming of mine was something that led to the sense that I was alone, and led me to feel like I was a second-class Mormon—second-rate because I couldn't accomplish this sensory, infallible encounter with the Holy Ghost. I thought that there was something wrong with me.

It came to a head for me when I was in high school and began asking the big question that looms over the life of any young Mormon male: am I going to serve a mission? And by the way, I was born in the church, born of goodly parents, and raised to have faith. Not only that, I *loved* the church—loved everything about it! So as that crucial milestone came in my life where I had to decide whether to go on a mission, I wanted more than anything to serve! I *wanted* to do this, and yet when I was honest with myself I had to confess I didn't actually know for myself that the Church was true. I was following my parents' religion and way of life, and living on the borrowed testimony of family, friends, and ward members.

Here is the next confession that I need to make: I did something I'm not proud of. I was immature then, but now in my maturity I am ashamed to tell you I began to speak more loudly and in a voice that was more shrill. I would actually testify to a truth I didn't possess. I would stand up in church meetings and say things I had no right to say, that I didn't yet know for my own self. I was actually drawn to the pulpit, eager to say these things, anxious to please the community. And I thought that in the act of saying them—and saying them more loudly—the testimony would come.

So there's another confession for you.

Well, my public speaking notwithstanding, I did what Moroni challenged me to do. I think I was quite sincere. I spent significant time on my knees and approached my Heavenly Father in that prescribed way, asking for a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. And

brethren, it didn't come. I knew that if I was being honest with myself I had to admit I wasn't feeling any palpable sense of the Holy Spirit. I got up off my knees feeling foolish, defeated, and distressed.

So what was I to do?

Well brethren, here's the next confession: I submitted missionary papers, received a call to Japan, and departed for the field. You could say I caved, that this was a form of dishonesty. I'm inclined to look back on it more charitably. I *wanted* to serve. I think my motivation was pure, though I should also tell you I felt like a mission was an important rite of passage. I certainly felt the pressure young men feel to serve missions, and understood the opportunities I would be foreclosing if I didn't.

I arrived in Japan, where it started to trouble me. I was saying things to investigators I thought were true—hoped were true—but didn't *know* were true. So I thought it was crucial to continue this effort to obtain a personal witness, the kind Moroni describes, but because I was ashamed to be in this position I took my efforts underground. I would wait for my companion to fall asleep every night, and when I heard his heavy rhythmic breathing I would get up again and spend the night trying to induce this thing.

Well brethren, it didn't happen. That manifestation promised by scripture and witnessed by others positively eluded me.

After some months of this it reached a crisis point for me. Now despondent, I felt like if I was going to have integrity then I should confess these things to my leadership, to my mission president, and also to my parents. So I actually wrote a letter home to my parents confessing and lamenting my inability to cultivate a personal relationship with divinity.

Instantly, back comes a letter from my mother. You have to know Mom to fully appreciate this, but this is a woman who doesn't suffer fools. She can be very stern. So back comes her letter, which says "enough of this nonsense! This is pure foolishness—stop this at once! Stop praying with your knees, start praying with your feet instead."

Brethren, that letter came as revelation to me. What sweet relief it brought! It was complete and total liberation. I took her advice and decided "I'm going to stop doing this thing. I'm going to

stop holding a gun to the Lord's head and insisting on a sign. I'm just going to live my life as if the gospel is true."

So you must understand: upon reading that letter, I made a wager. *I decided to bet my entire life that the gospel was true.* From that point forward, that is what I have done and what I continue to do. I have wagered my entire life.

Now here's the kicker: the kicker is that in the course of serving my family and fulfilling priesthood duty, knowledge does in fact come. In the years since my mission, the witness I sought has arrived, completely unbidden, and never once on cue. For me it has come in ways I can barely describe, and never on command, and I'm not even sure that they're sensory or palpable. But I can tell you that I have somehow crossed a threshold into a very serious area, one I would describe as akin to knowledge, to the point where I would lay everything I am on the altar in its defense. Brethren, when I speak with conviction about the gospel it's not merely with hope and with faith but with something that is approaching knowledge. That I can tell you. But it has never come on my terms and never come to me on my timetable.

Now here's what's so striking: every time I have shared this experience I have been assailed by people who say "me too!" "That's my experience too!" So I'm starting to draw conclusions, that there really do seem to be two sets of Latter-day Saints: people for whom these experiences are forthcoming, and people for whom they are not. It's a curious outcome, but there it is. I think we can observe it empirically throughout the church.

Now, there is a passage in the Doctrine & Covenants that speaks to this, and for some reason it doesn't get the press it deserves, certainly not as much press as Moroni's promise. It's section 46, verses 11–14, and it says:

For all have not every gift given unto them; for there are many gifts . . . To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God . . . to others it is given to believe on their words.

That's me, okay? I think it is significant that believing on the words of another is described as a spiritual gift—a legitimate spiritual gift in and of itself, one that we might even seek after. This is *me*. And I don't think that makes me less of a Latter-day Saint, or less of a disciple.

Furthermore, I encountered the writings and the talks given by a number of general authorities in the church that speak directly to this, and if only I could have digested them at the time of my mission! It would have saved me so much consternation, so much self-doubt and recrimination!

I want to share some of these with you. First, I want to share with you the story of President David O. McKay, which I had never heard! But he stood up in the 1968 General Conference and told a story that turns out to be just like mine. I had *never* heard this from a church leader. This is President McKay:

I am going to tell you what happened to me as a boy upon the hillside near my home in Huntsville. I was yearning, just as you boys are yearning, to know that the vision given to the Prophet Joseph Smith was true, and that this Church was really founded by revelation, as he claimed. I thought that the only way a person could get to know the truth was by having a revelation or experiencing some miraculous event . . . So one day I was hunting cattle. While climbing a steep hill, I stopped to let my horse rest, and there, once again, an intense desire came over me to receive a manifestation of the truth of the restored gospel. I dismounted, threw my reins over my horse's head, and there, under a bush, I prayed that God would declare to me the truth of his revelation to Joseph Smith. I am sure that I prayed fervently and sincerely and with as much faith as a young boy could muster.

At the conclusion of the prayer, I arose from my knees, threw the reins over my faithful pony's head, and got into the saddle. As I started along the trail again, I remember saying to myself: "No spiritual manifestation has come to me. If I am true to myself, I must say I am just the same boy that I was before I prayed." I prayed again when I crossed Spring Creek, near Huntsville, and again in the evening to milk our cows.

The Lord did not see fit to give me an answer on that occasion, it wasn't until I had been appointed president of the Scottish Mission, that the spiritual manifestation for which I had prayed as a boy came. And it simply came as a natural sequence to the performance of duty.¹

So that is President McKay. That's interesting, right? And I want to read to you this from Elder Dallin Oaks, which is also interesting:

I have met persons who told me they have never had a witness from the Holy Ghost because they have never felt their bosom "burn

within them.” What does a “burning in the bosom” mean? Does it need to be a feeling of caloric heat, like the burning produced by combustion? If that is the meaning, then I have never had a burning in the bosom.²

That was Elder Oaks. Interesting, right? Now here’s Elder Packer:

Some have been misled by expecting revelations too frequently. I have learned that strong, impressive spiritual experiences do not come to us very frequently. Revelations from God—the teachings and directions of the Spirit—are not constant. We believe in continuing revelation, not continuous revelation. We are often left to work out problems without the dictation or specific direction of the Spirit. That is part of the experience we must have in mortality. The people I have found most confused in this Church are those who seek personal revelations on everything.³

Let me read you another one, this from Elder McConkie:

Some people postpone acknowledging their testimony until they have experienced a miraculous event. They fail to realize that with most people—especially those raised in the Church—gaining a testimony is not an event but a process. Being born again is a gradual thing, except in a few isolated instances that are so miraculous that they get written up in the scriptures. As far as the generality of the members of the Church are concerned, conversion is a process; and it goes step by step, degree by degree, level by level, from a lower state to a higher, from grace to grace, until the time that the individual is wholly turned to the cause of righteousness.⁴

Brethren, that is *me*! It describes my experience precisely!

So I wanted to share all of this, for what it’s worth.

But there’s something else I want to tell you, something very important. I want to point out that the Book of Mormon actually proposes *two* different models for obtaining faith and testimony.

This is *so* important! Somehow we forget this.

The one model we’ve covered already and everybody knows it because it gets all the press, and that model is laid out in Moroni 10, verse 4: ask and have a witness be delivered unto you. That’s a legitimate model; it’s scriptural, I believe it is possible, and that it can take place exactly as described.

And yet there’s another model laid out very clearly in the same book, which we must also take as scripture and therefore literal and therefore equally valid. This model or paradigm de-

scribes an entirely different path to faith and testimony and it is found in Alma 32, where the gospel is likened unto a seed. It uses an agricultural analogy, one that really resonates with me. It describes my own life experience.

According to this model we're not asked to have this dramatic confrontation with Deity, to seek out something bordering on mystical and to have it delivered on command. Instead, we're asked to do something altogether different, which is to cultivate a seed, to nurture it through our actions. It's a horticultural metaphor, where a testimony is a thing to be carefully planted, cultivated, watered, grown over a period of time, and thereupon tested.

And what do you test? You test the fruits, right? To me the fruits of the gospel are delicious. They pass my taste test.

Now, I find it a curiosity why our missionaries don't actually lead with *that*. I would *lead* with that if I had it to do over again! This is what I would be asking my investigators to do. I would merely say "plant this seed I am giving you. Test it. You might have to try it over a lifetime, but take a look at this seed and then make your own decision on the merits, whether it is good or not." That has been my experience. To me the fruits are so beautiful and so good that I've been willing to bet my entire life upon it.

So brethren, there's my story, and we your stake presidency feel that you have a right to know us in this way. You have a right to understand our spiritual journeys, how we come by the things that we say. And I will make you a promise right here, that you will never hear me say anything over the pulpit or in a church setting that is beyond my ability to know. If you listen carefully you will hear me choosing words like "believe" as in "I believe this is true" or "I trust this is true" or "I have accumulated enough evidence to persuade me this is the better path." I'll be using words very carefully.

Now having shared my story, I would like to make five observations for all of us here in the Menlo Park Stake, each on our own faith journeys. Will you indulge me in these five observations?

Here they are:

First, and I want to say this very clearly: if you happen to be somebody who wonders; if you happen to be somebody who is ex-

periencing doubt about the church or about the gospel or any of the great existential questions; to you we say: this is your home! You belong here with us, and you are badly wanted. Your stake presidency wants a community of saints who are probing, who are discovering, who are testing, and who are making a serious and systematic investigation. We're not trying to cultivate a stake of passive believers mouthing platitudes. We are trying to cultivate active believers and genuine seekers. That is the kind of stake that we seek to lead. If you are finding doubts or asking questions, this is a safe and appropriate place to do that. And I can say that because my own Hosannas have passed through the crucible of doubt.

The scriptures make it perfectly clear there is a place for doubt and for skepticism and that this is part of the journey. Remember in the book of Mark when the man seizes upon the Savior and says "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief," and how the Savior looked especially kindly upon him. Count me as one of those.

My second observation is to issue a challenge to those who are feeling either smug or complacent in the faith. We want to root this out. Forgive me, but I think there are a few too many Mormons who have decided that because the church is true, we therefore have all the answers to every question, all of the theological questions that have plagued scholars and theologians for centuries. Disciples have been breaking their heads open over these questions for centuries, but because we have the gospel, we know every answer and there's nothing left for us to do but to be perfunctory Mormons, mouthing the words we learned in Primary. In my view, nobody is excused from the work of probing and questioning. All of us have a duty to examine the great questions our theology poses. I fear too many of us confuse faith with depth. This we must never do. An unexamined faith is not worth having.

Not only that, there is so much truth that is yet to be revealed! Remember we believe in continuing revelation. Will it come without any effort on our part as a Church?

This leads to the third observation I would like to make: the church is a dynamic organization. By dynamic I mean it changes. The gospel is timeless but the Church is not. I have lived long enough to witness the Church make many great and significant

changes in my lifetime—things pertaining to doctrine, or to our policies and practices. This includes things about women, about priesthood, about the garments we wear, and more. So this is significant. We should all understand that the Church is a dynamic thing, and one that will grow and change and develop as circumstances warrant, and we will witness it in our lifetimes.

My fourth observation is to suggest we have a role to play in that evolution. We should be agents in helping discover truth, agents in helping the church grow and increase and improve as an institution. Now we make distinctions of course between the gospel and the church, right? There was a marvelous talk in this past General Conference about that, the difference between the Church and the gospel. I urge you to read that and apply it to our stake as well. Over the nine years of our stake presidency, I'm sure you'll see many things come and go, and important changes made. We want you to be enlisted in the change. We want you to feel like you are agents in this, vital stakeholders. We want you to be innovative with us, and entrepreneurial and creative. We want you to bring your best thinking and we want you to help us.

Here's the last observation I would like to make: it is an invitation to the members of our stake. We hope that you'll pray with your knees and also pray with your feet. We of course counsel you to pray fervently upon your knees. We seek those prayers, join with you in those prayers, and we rejoice in those prayers. But we also envision a stake full of people who are caught up in the work. It's a work of compassion. It's a work of saving, one person at a time. It's a work of toil and sweat in this place where we're trying to build a portion of the kingdom. And it's our experience (it's certainly my experience) that in the act of service, in the act of fulfilling our duty, this is where the greater knowledge comes, the greater light and knowledge. So we want to encourage that spirit of active learning among all of us.

It is a privilege speaking to you in this way, and I thank you for looking on me and my confessions with acceptance. I look forward to dialogue on these subjects, but for now I will close my remarks, invoking the sacred name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. David O. McKay, *Report of the Semi-Annual Conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, October 1968 (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, semi-annual), 84–87.
2. Dallin H. Oaks, “Teaching and Learning by the Spirit,” *Ensign*, March 1997.
3. Boyd K. Packer, *That All May Be Edified* (Bookcraft, 1982), 337.
4. Bruce R. McConkie, “Be Ye Converted” (address given at the BYU First Stake Quarterly Conference, February 11, 1968), 12.

CONTRIBUTORS

MICHAEL AUSTIN {maustin66@gmail.com} is Provost, Vice President of Academic Affairs, and Professor of English at Newman University. He lives in Wichita, Kansas, with his wife, Karen, and his children, Porter and Clarissa.

JACOB BAKER {jacob.t.baker@gmail.com} is a doctoral candidate in Philosophy of Religion and Theology at Claremont Graduate University and an instructor at Brigham Young University where he teaches philosophy and philosophy of religion.

BRIAN CHRISTENSEN is an art professor and sculptor whose work ranges from formal outdoor public works to figurative and narrative sculptures. He has a passion for materials and produces work by traditional methods, such as bronze casting and ceramics. But he also incorporates more unconventional methods and materials, such as steel fabrication and synthetic materials, when required to support his art concept. Much of his work walks a line between formalism and narrative approaches. Christensen grew up in San Diego and currently teaches at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. He lives with his wife and two children in Springville, Utah where his home studio is located. Christensen has exhibited extensively nationally and abroad and continues to engage his passion for teaching and contemporary art.

R. A. CHRISTMAS {rachristmas@gmail.com} has been a contributor of poetry, fiction, and criticism to *Dialogue* since the first issue. He has degrees from Stanford, U.C., Berkeley, and USC (Ph.D. 1968, Medieval English Literature). He is the author of seven books of verse, a novel, and a collection of song-writing—all of which can be found at www.lulu.com/spotlight/rachristmas.

ERICA EASTLEY has spent several years living, volunteering, working, traveling, and studying in Central Asia and the Middle East.

JUSTIN EVANS {evjustin@yahoo.com} currently lives in rural Nevada with his wife and three sons, where he teaches various subjects at the local high school. He has published four chapbooks of poetry, as well as the full length collection, *Town for the Trees* (Foothills, 2012). His poetry is forthcoming in *Weber—The Contemporary West*, and *Ithica-Lit*. He is the editor of *Hobble Creek Review*.

JACK HARRELL {HARRELLJ@byui.edu} teaches English and creative writing at Brigham Young University-Idaho. He is the author of two books of fiction, *Vernal Promises*, and *A Sense of Order and Other Stories*.

MICHAEL HICKS {michael_hicks@byu.edu}, composer, performer, scholar, and poet teaches in the School of Music at BYU. He is the author of five books, the latest of which is *The Street-Legal Version of Mormon's Book* (2012).

BLAIR DEE HODGES {lifeonaplate@gmail.com} is currently completing his master's thesis on "Intellectual Disability in Mormon Thought and History" at Georgetown University.

CLIFTON HOLT JOLLEY {clifton@adventcommunications.com} lives in Texas with his wife, Avigail, and her three dogs. He receives occasional visits from six children, their families, his bishop, and his rabbi.

MARK KILMER is a teacher and author living in Helsinki, Finland; he blogs at bycommonconsent.com.

JONATHON PENNY {jonathon.penny@gmail.com} practices what he professes in the United Arab Emirates, where he is assistant professor of English literature, a husband, and a father. His scholarship focuses on religion and literature and alternative modernisms. He also writes poetry and fiction under his own name and as amanuensis to Percival P. Pennywhistle, PhD. He is poetry editor at Wilderness Interface Zone, and, together with Jenny Jones Webb, a founding partner of Peas Porridge Press.

LEVI PETERSON {altlevip@msn.com} is a retired professor of English at Weber State University, presently living in Issaquah, Washington, with his wife, Althea. A former editor of *Dialogue*, he is the author of two collections of short stories, *The Canyons of Grace* and *Night Soil*; two novels, *The Backslider* and *Aspen Maroonery*; a biography, *Juanita Brooks: The Life Story of a Courageous Historian of the Mountain Meadows Massacre*; and an autobiography, *A Rascal By Nature, A Christian By Yearning*.

JIM RICHARDS {richardsj@byui.edu} completed a Ph.D. in literature and creative writing at the University of Houston in 2003, and has since

taught at BYU-Idaho. His poems have appeared in *The Prairie Schooner*, *Poet Lore*, the *Texas Review*, *Contemporary American Voices*, and in the anthology *Fire in the Pasture*.

STEPHEN C. TAYSOM {s.taysom@csuohio.edu} is a professor of the history of religion at Cleveland State University. His published works include *Shakers, Mormons and Religious Worlds: Conflicting Visions, Contested Boundaries* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), and an edited collection titled *Dimensions of Faith: A Mormon Studies Reader* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2011).

WALTER E. A. VAN BEEK {woutervanbeek@hetnet.nl} holds the chair of Anthropology of Religion at Tilburg University and is Senior Researcher at the African Studies Centre, Leiden. He has done extensive fieldwork in West Africa, i.e. among the Dogon of Mali and the Kapsiki of North Cameroon, on which he has published widely. Recently his monograph on Kapsiki religion appeared at Oxford UP: *The Dancing Dead: Ritual and Religion among the Kapsiki/Higi of North Cameroon and Northeastern Nigeria*, 2012. As 'participant expert' of Mormonism he has published a series of articles on LDS Mormonism in Europe, specifically in the Netherlands, in *Dialogue* and the *International Journal of Mormon Studies*. As a former stake president he is now high priest group leader and the proud grandfather of eleven grandchildren.

ROSALYNDE FRANDSEN WELCH {rosalynde.welch@gmail.com} is an independent scholar of early modern literature and Mormon studies. She holds a Ph.D. from the University of California at San Diego in English literature. She writes a column for Patheos.com on LDS culture and theology. She lives with her husband and four children in St Louis, Missouri.



Brian Christensen
Skull Valley, steel,
45"x 48"x 18"

DIALOGUE

a journal of mormon thought



Be sure to visit dialoguejournal.com
where you'll find...

New podcasts featuring guests
David Campbell, John Turner,
Bob Rees and Caitlin Ryan



Book Reviews, archived issues,
\$1.99 downloadable articles,
and featured online content
from many corners of the web.

And find us on Facebook at Dialogue: a
journal of Mormon Thought and follow
us on Twitter @Dialogue Journal

PRINT: Old-fashioned but most beloved.

1 year (4 issues) \$50, international \$70, seniors/students \$35

ELECTRONIC: Be the first to read the newest edition online.

Download, print, and share full-text pdfs. \$25

DVD ARCHIVE: Contains Volumes 1–44, 1966–2011

Read and print full-text pdfs. \$40

Join our **DIALOGUE**. Subscribe today.

More titles and special offers available on our website.

www.dialoguejournal.com

DIALOGUE
po box 381209
Cambridge, MA 02238
electronic service requested

DIALOGUE

volume 45 no. 4 winter 2012

