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In Praise of Ourselves: 
Stories to Tell

William A. Wilson

Of the twenty-seven faculty members who have occupied this podium since the inauguration of this lecture series in 1964, only two have represented the humanities—my fellow folklorist Thomas Cheney in 1967 and Arthur Henry King in 1976. In a world challenged by polluted air, disappearing natural resources, a depleted ozone layer, unchecked diseases, crowded highways and airways, burgeoning crime rates, killing drugs, and rapidly shifting geopolitical borders and alliances, a commitment to the study and advancement of the humanities may seem at times an unaffordable luxury. It is in such a world, seeking desperately for solutions to its problems in improved technology and more effective social orders, that President Bush can, as he did in his recent State of the Union address, sound a clarion call for excellence in education, can demand that by the year 2000 United States children be “first in the world in math and science,” and can pass by in deafening silence a corresponding need for our children to excel in their understanding and appreciation of arts and letters—of the humanities.

A few years ago, when I was teaching at another university, the faculty became embroiled in one of those too-typical wranglings over allocations of resources. One faculty member (or so it was reported to me; I was not at the meeting) addressed his colleagues from the English department with the scornful and, in his judgment, rhetorical question: “You certainly wouldn’t give up a cure for cancer for poetry, would you?” I have always been sorry I was not at that meeting so I could have responded: “For one poem, maybe not; but for poetry—yes.”

And I would have said that as one who has watched his own father and several loved relatives die of cancer and who has suffered two primary cancers himself. One quiet night, in the darkened silence of my hospital room, with the terrifying words of the pathology report swirling again and again through my head—

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“well-differentiated carcinoma”—it was not the hope of some miraculous cancer cure looming on the horizon that got me through to morning but rather defiant phrases like those of the poet Dylan Thomas, hurled angrily and repeatedly at approaching and inevitable death and reminding me all the while of my individual and human worth:

Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.¹

I would not for a moment belittle or detract from the serious work of any of you in the social and physical sciences as you try to solve problems that bedevil the world. I would simply remind you, and all of us, that it is the humanities—the products of the imperishable human spirit—that teach us your struggles are worth carrying on, that we and this world we occupy are worth saving.

But I do not wish tonight to make yet one more defense of the humanities. I trust that before this audience such a defense is not necessary. I would hope, rather, to broaden our concept of what we call the humanities, and of literature in particular, and to suggest that as we seek evidence of the significance of human life, we turn not just to those canonized masterworks taught in our literature courses but to works of our own invention and to our own capacity to create and appreciate beauty. I would suggest, that is, that we seek courage to face the future by learning to celebrate ourselves.

Many of you are aware of recent attempts to expand the traditional literary canon to include those who have been excluded from it on the bases of race, class, or gender. In our pluralistic society, with its many voices—all different but all American—we have come gradually to understand that if we really cherish the democratic ideals of equal worth of all our citizens, then we must learn to listen to their diverse and endlessly interesting artistic voices, not just to those who happen to be primarily white, male, middle-class Anglo-Saxons. We have in recent years made considerable progress in reaching these democratic ideals as more and more minority, ethnic, and women’s literature has made its way into university literature courses. But one group of people we have continued to neglect—ourselves. We may have studied the novels of white, male William Faulkner or of black, female Toni Morrison, but most of us have neglected the swirl of stories that has surrounded us since we were born—stories we listen to or tell about the events of everyday life and about the worlds we occupy. Of such stories, Neil Postman has written recently:
Human beings require stories to give meaning to the facts of their existence. I am not talking here about those specialized stories that we call novels, plays, and epic poems. I am talking about the more profound stories that people, nations, religions, and disciplines unfold in order to make sense out of the world. . . . A story provides a structure for our perceptions; only through stories do facts assume any meaning whatsoever. This is why children everywhere ask, as soon as they have the command of language to do so, "Where did I come from?" and "What will happen when I die?" They require a story to give meaning to their existence. Without air, our cells die. Without a story, our selves die.²

Here, too, we have made progress, as personal and autobiographical narratives have gradually become recognized by critics as vital literary genres worthy of serious attention. But most of these efforts have focused on written rather than on oral narratives— a somewhat disconcerting fact since writing is a fairly recent invention and since people were telling stories long before anyone ever put pen to paper, as long, in fact, as we have had people. Indeed, the capacity to tell and enjoy stories may be one of our few cultural universals. It is to these oral personal narratives that I wish to devote my attention tonight.

Though we have been at the game longer than most, folklorists are not the only scholars to pay heed to such stories. In fact, in recent years many people have gotten on the bandwagon. Literary scholars have examined oral narratives to discover how literary texts are constituted, sociologists to catalog customs and life-styles, organizational behaviorists to record the corporate myths that lend cohesiveness to organizations, historians to take the pulse of a particular era, anthropologists to elucidate larger cultural patterns. But in all this the individual—the creator and teller of the stories—gets lost. His or her narratives become means to ends rather than ends themselves. However much the narratives may help us understand the larger societies of which they are constituent parts (and efforts to reach such understanding have also been a principal aim of folklore study), from a humanistic perspective the stories need no further justification for being than their own existence. It is as individual stories of individual, breathing human beings—not as dots on a chart of social norms—that they speak to us of our humanity.

The most essential of these stories may be those we tell about our own experiences and narrate primarily in family contexts. I can't imagine that you will be overly interested in my particular family, but by showing you how such stories have operated there perhaps I can lend you new lenses to look at the ways they operate in your families. But first I must tell you a little of my own personal
narrative. And to do that, I have to begin with the principal storyteller in my family, my mother, Lucile Green Wilson.

My mother is a product of Welsh and English stock. Her mother’s Welsh parents were hard-working, loyal to their church, fiery in temperament, and stubborn—especially stubborn. For example, when my mother’s grandmother, Jane Morse, was being courted by the man she eventually married, Jonah Evans, her parents opposed the marriage because he was twenty years her senior and already had two wives and a passel of children. Says my mother: “Her parents liked Grandpa all right, but they didn’t want her to marry him because she was just a kid and he was old. They’d lock the doors so she couldn’t get out, and she’d climb out of her window, out of her bedroom window, to go meet him.” One of the children of this union, my mother’s Uncle Victor, matched his parents in hardheadedness and, in a rather strange way, characterized the family’s persistence to principle:

They said when he baptized Uncle Victor, Uncle Victor didn’t want to be baptized—Uncle Victor was always kind of a rebel, and he didn’t want to be baptized, and Grandpa baptized him anyway. And every time he would come up out of the water Uncle Victor would swear, and he would duck him in again. And it went on for I don’t know how many times before Uncle Victor finally quit swearing and got baptized. [pause] I don’t think it ever took.3

My mother’s English grandfather, Robert Green, a widower the whole time my mother knew him, was a different sort. According to family tradition, he had been given a name and a blessing by Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, but that must not have taken either because he was not much of a churchgoer and liked an occasional drink. One day, in his cups, he drove his favorite team of horses, old Cap and Seal, full speed into the farmstead and almost mowed down my mother—an event that stirred to a considerable pitch his daughter-in-law’s Welsh temper. But Robert Green was also a soft and gentle man, never speaking harshly to anyone, generous, quick of wit, a lover of books.

From these forebears, then, came my mother, an amalgamation of their characteristics plus others forged by the harshness and poverty of frontier life: intelligent, sensitive, eager to learn, witty, hard-working, proud of her achievements, determined, but shy, and, during her teenage years, embarrassed in the presence of townspeople by her country girl’s dress and manners. Out of her inheritance and out of her experiences came also an ability to capture in concrete detail the events of her life and to make them memorable to others—that is, the capacity to tell stories.
I owe my own love of words to my mother. Although my father had many virtues, verbal dexterity was not one of them. My mother, on the other hand, grew up immersed in words, and she immersed me in them. In the homesteading cabin of her youth, her own mother would gather her children around her each night and read from books borrowed from the library. "I can still remember," my mother says, "how fun it was for all of us just to sit around and listen to Mama read." Describing her experiences in elementary school, Mother says, "I remember that one morning when she [her teacher] picked up that book and said, ‘Tom, oh Tom,’ and I just got goose pimples. I knew we were going to hear another good story. It was Tom Sawyer."

During my own formative years, we were fortunate enough to live in a house with no electricity, surrounded by almost no neighbors, and with few means of entertainment besides ourselves. I can still remember those dark winter nights when my mother dressed me and my sister in our pajamas, then, before tucking us in bed, gathered us into the light of the coal-oil lamp, and, like her mother before her, read us magical stories from books.

But my mother also taught me to love words in other ways, by using them well, by bringing to life the world of her past through well-wrought oral narratives. Her family simply lived by the spoken word. Family gatherings at my grandparents’ home were, in fact, one long stream of story, with my mother’s brothers, railroaders all, regaling each other with accounts of their occupational and heroic exploits—each narrator trying to top the others. My mother did not participate much in these exchanges, though her storytelling ability matched that of her brothers. Hers were more quiet narratives, told in the privacy of our home and bringing to life for me and my sisters the village of her youth, a place called Riddyville, west of McCammon, Idaho, where, following the turn of the century, thirteen families homesteaded neighboring sections of land recently released from the Fort Hall Indian Reservation. Through my mother’s stories, the excitement, the passion, the sorrow and heartbreak experienced by those Riddyville pioneers became a treasured part of my life.

When I entered Brigham Young University in 1951, I attempted at first to leave behind the experiences of my youth. I majored in political science and began studying Russian—I think I had dreams of one day parachuting into the Soviet Union as a spy and saving our country from that evil empire. But my love of words artfully employed finally proved too strong—I couldn’t resist them. I abandoned my dreams of saving the nation and began instead to study English and American literature, rediscovering in
the process much of the magic I had first discovered in the flickering light of a coal-oil lamp under the spell of my mother’s voice. By the time I had completed an M.A., however, I had grown weary of the narrow elitism of the “new critical,” or formalist, approaches current at the time—approaches that jerked literature from cultural context and tended to look with condescension at the kinds of stories I had learned from the good people of my rural Idaho and Mormon youth.

So I switched and earned a Ph.D. in folklore. My research centered first on the folk culture of the land where I had served my LDS mission, Finland, then switched to the Mormon and western culture that had produced me—focusing for the next twenty years not just on the privileged few whose works had made their way into university courses, but on people like you in this audience and on the richness and artistry of the stories many of you tell.

Through all this, however, I was still collecting, analyzing, and celebrating the stories, the creative efforts, of other people, and still using those stories primarily to elucidate larger cultural patterns. I learned a great deal about Mormon society and, I hope, through my studies helped other people bring that society into a little sharper focus. But all the while, in the back of my mind, haunting my reveries, tugging at me in ways I did not understand, demanding my attention, lurked those stories I had learned from my mother, and the country village they had brought to life—Riddyville. Finally, more to exorcise a nagging spirit than anything else, I plunked my mother in front of a tape recorder and said, “All right, tell me again about Riddyville.” And she did. For the next ten years, whenever the possibility allowed, we filled tape after tape, grew closer together throughout the process, and experienced together the short but moving life of Riddyville.

The place itself actually got off to a rather inauspicious start. When the Fort Hall land became available for homesteading, farmers lined up at the Marsh Creek Bridge on Merrill Road near McCammon. Someone shot a gun in the air, and the race was on to file claims at the government land office at Blackfoot. Some took the train; others rode horses, with exchange relays set up along the way to speed up the trip. Still, all managed to arrive in Blackfoot about the same time. As the train pulled into town, one hopeful homesteader, Max Cone, eager to file his claim ahead of the others and thus get the best land, jumped from the still moving train and broke his leg. The rest of the crew arrived safely at the land office, only to find it closed. Not until several days later did they finally manage to file their claims, evidently without much contest, and then return to their new homes. Such was Riddyville’s beginning.
Although my grandparents lived on their farm the required time each summer to "prove up" their claim, they did not move the family to Riddyville from their home in Woodruff, Utah, until 1915, when my mother was eight. At that time, they moved into a newly-constructed two-room log cabin, where, for the next twelve years, they lived with their seven children and at times with my grandfather's unmarried brother, Uncle Jim, who also owned a homestead but took turns living with his relatives. In 1927 my grandfather finally gave up the effort to wrest a living from 160 acres of arid Idaho land, took a job on the railroad, and moved to town. By then my mother was twenty years old, soon to be married, and Riddyville had become a part of her past, living from then on only in her stories.

When I first began collecting these stories, I sought primarily to recount my mother's history and, to the extent possible, to reconstruct the history of Riddyville. I quickly gave up this attempt as I discovered that while the stories were based on history and occasionally approximated history, they themselves were not history.

This fact was borne home again just the other day. My mother's brother Ralph recently wrote his account of the family's Riddyville years and sent a copy to my mother. The next time I saw him, he said, with a chuckle, "Well, I just got a corrected copy of my history back from your mother." My mother, in turn, explained that she had to correct Ralph's history because it contained so many errors. As I reflected on their comments, I recalled the words of historian Hayden White: "Historiography has remained prey to the creation of mutually exclusive though equally legitimate, interpretations of the same set of historical events or the same segment of the historical process."

If my mother and her brother might be called local historiographers, if their equally legitimate stories about the past, derived from equally legitimate perceptions, are based on history, sometimes approximate history, but are not history—that is, are not verifiable accounts of what really happened—then what are they? The answer is: they are fictions—stories created from carefully selected events from their own lives, just as short stories, novels, and epics are created from carefully selected details from the worlds of their authors. And their appeal is not the appeal of history—and don't misunderstand me; I have nothing against history—but of literature.

In the passage I cited earlier from Neil Postman, he argues that the stories told by ordinary people about the events of their lives are more profound than novels, plays, and epic poems. I think not. I think these stories are important precisely because they have the
power of literature, because, as I shall try to argue, they actually are, or can be, novels or epics. This explains why I have not been able to get my mother’s stories out of my head these many years. Like other works of literature I cherish, they have stayed with me because of their artistic power, because of their ability, as Sir Philip Sidney might say, to hold “children from play and old men from the chimney corner.”

Reduced to cold print, the stories may not seem to you particularly artful. But if you could have been there during the tellings (and remember that I am talking about oral narratives), if you could have seen my mother’s gestures and facial expressions, if you could have heard her voice rise in excited exclamation, drop now to a hushed whisper, move to a dry chuckle, break into tears—if you, that is, could have heard these stories in live performance, with a charged and on-going dynamic relation occurring between teller and listeners, you would have understood their power to excite my fancy, engage my sympathies, and move me with joy or terror.

This fact really should have been obvious to me much earlier. One of the advantages of growing up in a family and hearing someone like my mother tell her stories again and again is that one soon learns to separate recurring, structured narratives from regular discourse. This is the reason, by the way, why each of you, rather than an uninformed outsider, should collect the narratives told by the storytellers in your families—you know what they are. Originally, I attempted to collect my mother’s life history from beginning to end, but, as noted, with few satisfactory results. Then I sat down one day and made a list—a long list—of the discrete stories I had heard my mother tell many times. From then on, in our sessions before the tape recorder, I tried to ask questions that would lead her into the natural telling of these stories. For example, if I asked about dry fields and struggles over irrigation waters, I knew I would probably learn little about irrigation but that I would in all likelihood get the story about Uncle Jim and Ike Allen fighting over water—a story I’ll relate in a moment. Using this method over a ten-year period, I often managed to collect the same story three, four, or five times. And I discovered that different tellings of the same story were remarkably similar in structure and even in phraseology.

For example, not only my mother’s unmarried Uncle Jim, but also her grandfather, Robert Green, took turns living with different sons and daughters and thus became close to his grandchildren. My mother, whom Robert Green called Dolly, considered herself one of his favorites. In 1980, she told me:
When Grandpa would stay with Aunt Vira, her house was kinda up on a hill...; he could go out at the back of their lot and look down where we came with the cows. He was always worrying about me, wondering where I was. He wouldn’t rest until he could see those cows coming home. Nona [my mother’s cousin] used to get so mad. She’d say, “He wouldn’t care if I never got home, and he has to go out there [and say], ‘I wonder where Dolly is; she ought to be coming by now.’” Said he’d walk out there two or three times.

Three years later Mother embedded the same story in a string of other narratives she was telling:

Nona used to get mad at him... When Bernice and I used to go get the cows, when Grandpa was up living at Aunt Vira’s, you could see way down where—part of the way where we had to go after the cows. And Nona said, he used to go out—he’d say, “I wonder if Dolly’s home yet?” He didn’t worry about Bernice, I guess. He’d go out there and watch two or three times every night, cause we’d fool around, run races on our horses and let the cows mosey on home, and we didn’t hurry any, and he’d worry until he’d see us coming, and then he’d settle down. She said, “Ya, he wouldn’t worry a bit if it was me, but he always has to see that Dolly gets home all right.”

The second narrative is slightly more detailed than the first; otherwise, they are almost exactly the same, though told three years apart. Clearly, then, from the many details she could have talked about, my mother has selected only a few and from them has constructed identifiable, recurring narratives. When she has told these stories over the years, she has not been reciting history—she has been presenting herself to the world and capturing through these artistic forms the values and people she holds dear.

How do my mother’s stories work as literature? They work, I would argue, the same way a novel works. In fact, I would call my mother’s stories not the family history, but the family novel. Sandra Dolby Stahl calls stories like those my mother tells “single-episode” narratives. But such a characterization misses the mark. My mother’s stories do, to be sure, recount single events, but they do not stand alone; they are always related to other stories and background events and can be understood only as they are associated with these—something literary critics call intertextuality. It is through this intertextuality that characters in the family oral novel emerge into full-blown, three-dimensional individuals, just as well-developed characters emerge gradually from the pages of a written novel—no character is ever fully defined on the first page of a novel. It is also through this intertextuality that events in a number of the stories interlink into coherent meaningful wholes,
just as events in a novel unfold and interlink as we push our way through page after page. Really to understand one of these stories, then, we have to have heard them all and have to bring to the telling of a single story the countless associations formed from hearing all the stories.

Unfortunately, you can never fully comprehend my family’s novel because you have not lived my life, have not heard the total body of stories I have heard, do not recognize the connections that are obvious to me. But you have heard the novels of your own families, you can make those connections that exist between their various episodes, and you can let the coherent wholes that emerge from the stories play forceful, artistic roles in your lives.

Let me try to demonstrate this intertextuality with an extended example. The dryland homesteads of Riddyville were located on a bench above the valley floor, where ancient Lake Bonneville once made its rush to the sea. The actual farmsteads where the people lived were strung along a winding road below the bench, parallel to Lake Bonneville’s dying remnant, Marsh Creek. Both on the bench and in the gardens below, water was always in short supply, especially at my mother’s home, where it had to be carried from a neighbor’s well, a fact responsible, says my mother, for her long arms. In equally short supply was any money to buy delicacies. With those facts in mind, consider the following brief story:

One time we had—we carried water all summer to water some pumpkins. You never heard of canned pumpkins, and we all liked pumpkin pies. And we carried water all summer, and those pumpkins were so nice. And on Halloween, Ike Allen’s kids came and tipped our toilet over and put all of our pumpkins down in it.

A typical rural Halloween prank? Maybe. But in another telling of that same story my mother said, “After he [Allen] got on the rampage, being ornery, that’s when their kids . . . tipped our toilet over and put all our pumpkins down the toilet hole.” Clearly, when my mother says, “after he got on the rampage,” she is depending on my already knowing other, connected stories.

Of the thirteen families that lived in Riddyville, all but one, the Allen family, were related either by blood or marriage and stuck together like glue. Ike Allen was friendly enough at first, until he ran for trustee of the village school. His family voted for him; the other twelve families voted for their family candidate, and Ike’s political career came to a quick end. So, too, did his good cheer. “He used to call us the ‘Cat Family,’” said my mother; “he hated us”—a fact borne out by the following story:
There was one patch on top of the dugway that belonged to Ike Allen, and we used to always go—there was a little road went right through it into our field—and when he got on the rampage, he fenced our gate shut. And Dad went up there one day and couldn’t get through, so he cut the wire, and Ike came after him and was going to hit him over the head with a club.

Now let’s move for a moment to my mother’s Uncle Jim. A shy, sensitive man, with a perpetually watery eye that made him look less attractive than he actually was, he had been jilted in his youth by his one true love and never again tried to marry. A little slower in wit than his married brothers, with their dry, but quick-paced, frontier humor, Uncle Jim occasionally became the subject of humor himself, though almost always in an affectionate manner. He bought a car but never learned to drive, leaving that task primarily to his nephews. One day two of these trickster nephews took him to Lagoon amusement park, in his own vehicle, and somehow coaxed him onto the roller coaster. When the coaster car arrived at the crest of the first hill and Uncle Jim surveyed the trip that lay ahead, he decided not to take it, and stood up to get out. Only the most strenuous efforts of his nephews kept him in his seat. The following story, which might have come right out of James Thurber, casts in relief not only Uncle Jim but many of the Riddyleville characters of which he was a part:

Orville Harris [my mother’s cousin] lived just up above us, up the road from us, and he and Hazel had gone some place—Detta [another cousin] was staying there, and she wanted Bernice and me to stay all night with her. And—so we talked—she had been working in Pocatello, and she told us about one night when she was on her way home from work and somebody followed her and how scared she was and how she went up on somebody’s steps until this man disappeared, or went away. So we were already in a scary mood, and then there was a hole in the window, and there was a black cat’d keep jumping in through that hole, and we’d put him out, and he’d come right back. We were spooky anyway. But we finally went to sleep, or Bernice and I did. And after while Detta woke us up, and she said there was a man in the house. We told her, “Oh, it’s just your imagination,” after all this stuff we had been talking about. She said, “No, sir,” she saw him on his hands and knees in that bedroom door. So about this time we could hear somebody walking outside—we lit the lamp—had lamps, you know—and started to dress because we weren’t—she said we couldn’t stay there any more. So we each got ahold of our shoe to defend ourselves, and Clyde Ketchum, her brother-in-law, walked up to that window and laughed. And it’s funny we didn’t all have heart attacks—we were so scared. And he claimed that he couldn’t sleep, so he came up to Orville’s—he lived, I imagine, a good mile and a half or more away. But he said he came up to Orville’s to see if he could get some of his records he wanted to play. But Detta didn’t believe him. She figured he came up there
because he knew she was alone. Anyway we all dressed and decided to go down to our house to spend the rest of the night. Well, in the meantime, Leland Harris, Detta’s brother, and Glade Allen had gone to the show. And they had guns, a gun or something with them—they’d been to McCammon to the show. And on the way home, when they got about even to our house, our dog [Sport] went out after em barking, and one of them shot, just to scare the dog. And the dog disappeared. Albert [my mother’s brother] and Uncle Jim were sleeping outside. In the summer time, we always put the cot that they slept on outside, and they slept out there. So Albert kept worrying about old Sport, thought maybe those kids really had shot him. And so he finally got Uncle Jim to get up and—of course, there were never cars or anything in Ridyville in the night—he got Uncle Jim to get up and go with him, and they went up the road looking for old Sport just about the time that we were coming down to come to our place to stay all night. And they heard us coming, and they ran—poor old Uncle Jim with his bare feet, just a storming at Albert for doing this. We were already scared, and then we saw these two white things a running down the road. They had their underwear on—of course, we didn’t know it was them. But we decided we’d rather face whoever it was than go back up to Orville’s house. So we went on home, and when we got there Albert was just in hysterics laughing cause he’d—and Uncle Jim was so mad at him for getting him in such a predicament, and his feet hurting, running on those rocks. Then we all got to laughing about it afterwards.

But Uncle Jim was not just a humorous character—he was a generous and kindly man, much loved by all his family, often using his own money to come to the aid of his more financially strapped brother, my grandfather, Bert Green. When my mother’s sister Jessie died, a little girl to whom Uncle Jim had grown very close—she would climb into his lap and call him Gee—Uncle Jim dug into his own pocket to help pay for her casket, at the same time vowing that “he was never going to get that attached to another ‘youngun,’ cause it was too hard.”

We must really know all this and more before we can finally bring Uncle Jim and Ike Allen together in the following story and make it understandable:

The water we had came down Dry Holler—we always called em hollers—and it went past Ike Allen’s house. And it was Uncle Jim’s turn to have it, but Ike Allen just turned it off his—it was a dry year, I guess—and he turned Uncle Jim’s water off and put it on his crop there, whatever he had, and Uncle Jim went up and turned it back, and Ike Allen came out and hit him in the face. And poor old Uncle Jim—he had a tender skin anyway—and when he came home, why, it was just, the skin was just knocked off of his cheek where he had hit him. And I usually didn’t hate anybody, but that day I hated Ike Allen, cause I couldn’t stand it to have anybody hurt Uncle Jim.
We've come some distance from the pumpkins in the toilet and a little closer, I hope, to understanding the intertextuality that can tie seemingly disparate narratives together, providing texture and unity to the oral novels that circulate in our families.

One of the most interesting things about my mother as a storyteller is that she has absolutely no sense of chronology. "I can't remember," she says, "when all these [different] things happened." And she can't remember not because she lacks the capacity to do so—she has a quick and agile mind—but because she simply has no interest in chronological sequence.

What is true of my mother is probably true of most family storytellers—their narratives will focus primarily on recurrent values and themes. For example, in studying the narratives of a famous Texas storyteller, Ed Bell, Richard Bauman argued that eliciting a life-course history from Bell would not be very productive. He chose instead to examine Bell's "active performance repertoire"—stories that Bell, like my mother, told again and again—to show how Bell's personal narratives were "systemically" related—that is, how they clustered around and illustrated particular themes important to Bell.7

Commenting on this tendency of narrators like my mother or Ed Bell to focus on themes, Sharon Kaufman writes:

Though they are not deliberately fashioned, the themes people create [in their stories] are the means by which they interpret and evaluate their life experiences and attempt to integrate these experiences to form a self-concept.

In the description of their lives, people create themes—cognitive areas of meaning with symbolic force—which explain, unify, and give substance to their perceptions of who they are and how they see themselves participating in social life.... [Through the themes drawn from their life experience], individuals know themselves and explain who they are to others.8

My attempt in studying my mother's stories—and the approach I recommend to you—has been to discover how the individual narratives through which she explains herself to others are systemically related—that is, linked together into an artistic whole—by clustering around certain themes and individuals important to her. The unity in her family novel lies not in a linear plot leading from event to event toward a logical conclusion, but rather, as in some modern novels, in this clustering of motifs around given themes, with her always at the center. This process is also similar to what one finds in epic traditions where unity is derived from the accretion of narratives around cultural heroes and heroines and around dominant cultural values.
I could spend the next several days elucidating themes in my mother’s stories and showing how they relate to her and to her world. But time will permit only a few examples. One of the major themes in her stories is the grinding poverty that characterized her Riddyville youth. Year after year she watched her father watch the skies for clouds that seemed never to bring rain in time to save the crops from ruin, listening to him come in from the fields and say, “Well, it looks like the south forty’s beginning to burn.” When he would get up in the middle of the night, dress, and pace the roads of Riddyville worrying about the survival of his family, she would lie awake herself worrying about both him and the family. Once he borrowed money to buy a herd of Holstein cows to try to get ahead. My mother explains the results:

They just couldn’t make the payments—we had em for quite a long while; it was so nice to have a nice herd of milk cows. Then the bank finally foreclosed. And that day they came over—we didn’t know how we were even going to live, cause that’s all the money we had was cows. Anyway, I don’t know who came from the bank, but they went down the road with our cows, and we all stood on the porch. That was a sad old day; we just stood there and watched them take our living away, all of us crying. . . . We all felt the end of the world was coming. We had no money, no way to live except cream checks. We survived somehow.

When my mother reached high school age and began riding her horse each day to attend school in McCammon, about four miles away, she felt the effects of her family’s poverty even more keenly, as she now had to compare herself with the better-to-do and supposedly more sophisticated girls from town:

I made one dress in the fall, sent for some old ugly material and made a dress. . . . And I had to wear that all winter. I had to wear it to school; I had to wear it to church; I had to wear it anyplace I went. . . . A school teacher [who] lived across from us loaned me her dress one night to go to the New Year’s Eve dance over to Robin. And, oh, I felt like—I wouldn’t have been so stupid and backward if I’d had some clothes and coulda looked like other people. That night I just felt like a different human being to have that pretty dress on. It was a Kelly green—it had a wide belt. I danced a lot and I just felt like I was somebody else. You don’t know how that makes you feel to have to look like a dope all your life. They didn’t have any—my folks didn’t have any money.

Such accounts make my mother’s story of finally getting a pretty dress even more poignant:

It was one of the first times for a long while that I had new clothes. I had a new dress. I’d made this dress [at the end of my senior year] in school, and it was really pretty, and Mama had managed somehow.
to get me some new shoes and a new hat. And I was so happy to have a whole new outfit. And we were gonna go to [stake] conference in Arimo, and we had to go in the buggy. And I had to run out to the corral to do something before we left, and I didn’t want to get my new shoes dirty, so I put on my old horrible ones that I used to milk cows in, had manure and milk and everything else all over em. And I went out, and when I came back, I forgot to put my decent shoes on. We got almost up to Arimo, and I discovered what shoes I’d had on. So then I—it was too late to go back, so the rest of them went to church, and I drove the team down under the hill and sat there all day all by myself waiting for two sessions of conference to end. It was horrible. I was so proud of my new clothes. I thought for once—I never had new clothes. I hadn’t had any for ages, and I was so happy to have a whole complete outfit all at once. Then I ruined it. I don’t ever remember wearing it any other time—of course, I did, but I can’t remember it. All I remember about that dress was that terrible day.

In spite of the poverty, my mother loved Riddyville, loved the horses she rode, the games she played with friends, the visiting among neighbors, the smell of baking in the house when she came home from school—her mother baked eight loaves of bread every other day; she loved the generosity of the people, the kindness of the men, the faith of the village women who gathered en masse at her house, formed a circle around her mother’s sickbed, and knelt in prayer. But always there was the ambivalence: “Everybody was just like family; everybody helped each other, and everybody loved each other, and we were just—it was just a nice place to grow up, when you didn’t mind not having any money.”

But a compensating theme, just as strong as that of poverty, also pervades the narratives—that of never giving up no matter what the odds. I could illustrate this theme with a dozen stories—from Mother’s learning how to deal with cows by learning how to swear at them to her bringing run-away horses under control—but I will use just one. Weakened by an earlier case of mumps and by too much hard work for a young girl, my mother first lost thirty-seven pounds and then came down with rheumatic fever while she was in high school. The breakdown occurred something like this:

This one winter day I rode my horse to school, and it was thirty below zero. I was just so cold, and then when I got just about where you turn to go into McCammon, I felt like it was getting warm. I thought, “Gee, that weather’s changed; it’s warm now.” But by the time I got into town where I had to tie the horse up, I knew that it wasn’t warm, that I might be trying to freeze. . . .

Anyway, I could hardly tie the reins, and I got up to school; and on the way up there, if I’d had much further to go, I think I’d laid down. That snow looked so soft, and I was so tired. But I got there.
She got there, but that was about all. The doctor who examined her the next day said she wouldn’t live six months, that the valves in her heart were gone. Her response to that death sentence rings more strongly in her own words:

I stayed in bed for about six weeks... and then I started to get up about eleven and stay up two or three hours, and I kept doing a little more. And one day in February [she had taken ill at Christmas], it was nice and warm—kinda thawing—warm sun was shining on the porch. Mama went to town, and I said, “Go ask that doctor if I can go outside.” When she came back, she said he about had a fit. He said, “Why if I went outside, I’d have pneumonia, and that’d be the end of me.” But I said, “Well, I’ve been out all day—all afternoon.” I’d bundled up and sat out there. And I kept doing it. And that spring I rode my horse and went back to school.

Not only did she go back to school. Of the thirty students who started with her, fourteen finished—and she graduated second in the class.

From the events of her past, then, my mother has selected details and created a body of stories that place her in the center of and in control of her universe—stories that may not always be historically accurate but that have over time and through repeated tellings become what T. S. Eliot might call “objective correlates”: artistic representations for what she holds most dear and would most eagerly communicate to others. Though I have been able to give you only a brief glimpse of her stories—I intend eventually to bring them all together—I hope I have demonstrated that through their intertextuality and their systemic unity they form a powerful whole capable of moving us as good literature always moves us. I hope also that I have inspired some of you to seek in your family narratives the novels that may help shape your lives. As Elliott Oring points out, folklorists, while employing the methodologies of other disciplines, have been more willing “to view their own immediate environments and behaviors as material worthy of serious contemplation, analysis, and interpretation.” Such study, he says, can “begin simply as an encounter with objects and behaviors in one’s own living room.” If in your living rooms there are storytellers like my mother, I encourage you pick up the tape recorder and get to work.

As you do so, don’t be overly concerned with meaning. What do these stories mean to my mother? Since she is here tonight, I suspect I will find out when this lecture ends. But as you seek to understand your family stories, I recommend the words of Paul Ricoeur: “Like a text, human action is an open work, the meaning of which is ‘in suspense.’ It is because it ‘opens up’ new references
and receives fresh relevance from them that human deeds are also waiting for fresh interpretations to decide their meaning."¹¹ In other words, stories like my mother’s do not have fixed, determinate meanings, even to the narrator—and having once created the stories, the narrator in future recitations becomes both teller and audience. They serve rather as the means by which, as Annette Kolodny might argue, the storyteller structures her life and presents it to the world.¹² Through such stories, as Sharon Kaufman points out,

the self draws meaning from the past, interpreting and recreating it as a resource for being in the present . . . ; from this perspective, individual identity is revealed by the patterns of symbolic meaning that characterize the individual’s interpretation of experience . . . ; people formulate and reformulate personal and cultural symbols of their past to create a meaningful, coherent sense of self, and in the process they create a viable present. In this way the ageless self emerges: its definition is ongoing, continuous, and creative.¹³

What do the stories mean to me, and what might similar stories from your families mean to you? Even if these narratives did contain fixed meanings, we could never get at them precisely because that symbolic and imperfect system we call language would stand always in the way. But that shouldn’t dishearten us because as we listen to the stories we also are creating a meaningful, coherent sense of self, constructing our own lives in the process. If literary criticism has taught us anything in recent years, it has taught us that meaning lies as much in what we take to a text as in the text itself. What Robert Scholes says of reading can apply equally well to listening to stories:

If a book or a story or any other text is like a little life, and if our reading actually uses up precious time in that other story we think of as our lives, then we should make the most of our reading just as we should make the most of our lives. Reading reminds us that every text ends with a blank page and that what we get from every text is precisely balanced by what we give. Our skill, our learning, and our commitment to the text will determine, for each of us, the kind of experience that text provides. Learning to read . . . is not just a matter of acquiring information from texts, it is a matter of learning to read and write the texts of our lives.¹⁴

Scholes’s statement explains why it might be best to call my mother’s narratives both a family novel and a personal novel. It is family because it belongs to us all—each of us in the family having heard the same stories about the same family members in similar family settings, and each of us having access to many of the associations that make the stories meaningful. It is personal
because it belongs to each of us differently—each of us having filled in the blank page with which the novel ends in an individual way, according to individual need, and each of us having moved from the stories themselves to compose the individual texts of our lives.

For this reason I prefer to speak not of what the novel means to me, in any ultimate sense of meaning, but rather of what it does for me. It can give me a glimpse, as Sandra Dolby Stahl points out, of “a pearl of great price, another person’s soul.” That in itself is enough, but it does still more. On a lazy summer afternoon, with the oblique rays of an Idaho sun flickering through the curtains and highlighting the deep wrinkles in my mother’s face, we have sat before the tape recorder—laughing together, arguing, sometimes crying—as my mother has told her stories still another time and as a young girl from Riddleyville has ridden once more through both our imaginations.

As I have listened to my tapes of these sessions, I have heard in the background the steady, constant ticking of my mother’s old grandfather’s clock. Her grandfather, Robert Green, bought the clock for himself and later gave it to my grandparents on their marriage; my mother inherited it from them; and I hope one day to inherit it from her. I have heard the ticking of that clock all my life, just as I have heard my mother’s stories all my life. As I listen to it on the tape, it seems not just to tick away time but to dissolve time, making me one with all those people in Riddleyville and placing me in the center of narratives like the one I’ll read now in closing, a narrative about the first owner of the clock, Robert Green, who had fussed over my mother, worried about her, spoiled her—and whom she probably loved above all other people. One time, says my mother,

I went when he was up to Aunt Vira’s when he was real sick, and I went up to see him, and I was going to comfort him, and he wound up comforting me. I just looked at him and started to cry, cause I couldn’t stand it if anything happened to Grandpa. He said, “Now, don’t cry, Dolly; I’ll be all right.”

Because she couldn’t stand it if anything happened to him, Robert Green’s accidentally poisoning his beloved team of horses, old Cap and Seal, proved to be one of the most tragic days in my mother’s young life. Here is the story:

Grandpa thought nobody had horses like his and nobody’s watch told time [like his]. Even the railroad [time], if his was a little different, it was the railroad that was wrong, not his watch. He always said he had the correct time. . . . Anyway, we used to have poisoned oats and put them out around the fields to kill the squirrels in the summer,
because they would eat the crops. And Grandpa always bought his horses oats. He always had oats to feed old Cap and Seal. And this one time, he got in the wrong—he was staying with Uncle Dan then, or the horses were—and he got in the wrong sack of oats and fed them the poisoned oats. And—anyway they got real sick, and I wasn’t up there; I wasn’t in on this first part—the whole town was there doing everything they could possibly think of to save those horses. And old Cap was Grandpa’s favorite. Cap was just a plain bay, and old Seal had a little bit of brown mixed in with him—and he loved them both, but Cap was his favorite. And old Seal died first. And then—they were all still trying to save old Cap—and Grandpa came down to our place—he couldn’t stand it anymore to be around them—and he came down to our place and stayed all night. And the next morning Uncle Jim came down and Grandpa went out to the gate to meet him, and he says, “Well, what about it, Jimmy?” And Uncle Jim says, “Well, the old boy’s gone.” Then, of course, all of us started to cry—Mama and everybody—and we missed Grandpa; we didn’t know where he was. And Mama kind of had an idea. So she went out to the old outside toilet, and he was sitting there crying, . . . And then Uncle Jim—he dragged [old Cap and Seal] down in the hills there, and laid them just straight, so they would be side by side.

A couple of years ago I drove my mother to what once had been Riddyville. She showed me where their home had been, across from the two-room schoolhouse, where Aunt Vira had lived, where Uncle Dan had lived, where she had spent the afternoon in a tree, chased there by a raging bull, where she had jumped her horse across a rock-filled ravine none of her companions dared jump. Nothing remained except one old house that would soon join the others in ruin. I left my mother in the car briefly and walked over to it, startling out a deer taking shade under a decaying roof from the afternoon sun. As I walked back to the car through sagebrush and weeds grown higher than my head, across fields rutted by erosion, I could almost feel all the life that had once been there—children playing “Fox and Geese,” teenagers racing their horses down the road, men sharing labor during threshing, women scrubbing plank floors until they were white, young homesteading couples tilling their fields and dreaming of independence.

Now only the stories remain. But they do remain. And that family novel developed from those stories, created first by my mother as she shaped her life and then re-created by me as I have shaped mine, persists in my mind as powerful and as artistically moving as the works of literature that line my library shelf.

As I lay in my hospital bed years ago wondering what that well-differentiated carcinoma would finally do to me, it was not just Dylan Thomas’s “Do not go gentle into that good night” that brought me through the dark; it was also my mother’s line: “And
that spring I rode my horse and went back to school.” More than that, it was all that vigor, all that passion, all that humor, all that joy and tragedy, all that life that had been Riddleyville, living in my memory not as historical narrative but as the artistic rendering of significant human experience—that is, as literature, literature that testified to me once again of the indomitable nature of the human spirit and of its divine capacity to create and enjoy beauty.

William Faulkner tells us that it is the poet’s duty to write about these things, to lift our hearts by reminding us of the “courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory” of our lives.16 Too long we have looked for the expressions of this glory only in the canonized works of the received literary tradition. It is time now to realize our democratic ideals by listening finally to all the voices in our great land. Especially is it time to seek in our own family stories the Riddleyvilles that have created, expressed, and given direction to our own lives. It is time at last to celebrate ourselves; we all have stories to tell.

NOTES

3All narratives in this paper are taken from tape-recorded interviews which I conducted with Lucile Green Wilson between 1980 and 1989. After being cataloged, the tapes will be on deposit in the Brigham Young University Folklore Archive.
13Kaufman, Ageless Self, 14.
15Stahl, Literary Folkloristics, xi.
A Landowner Chides
Brigham Young
for Not Speaking to Him
at Buffalo Canyon,
and Receives an Answer

Thomas A. Kuhlman

I call it Buffalo Canyon, but real Westerners would scoff at that. The ravine’s edges at their steepest point plunge down an awesome thirty feet; the “canyon floor” is eighty feet across at its widest, and perhaps a thousand feet north to south. Gentler hillsides rise up to the east, west, and south to a grand height of 130 feet. Magnificent! Inspiring! Breathtaking!

So it’s not much of a canyon. I call its lowest, most level section Buffalo Wallow. I want to believe that bison hooves pounded down the dusty earth on this spot a century and a half ago, but if they didn’t, at least the city fathers of Florence, Nebraska, early in this century gave the name Buffalo Street to some parallel lines on a map of this place. They never actually constructed Buffalo Street, and when Florence was annexed by the City of Omaha, the prosaic designation North Thirty-Fourth Street was given to an imaginary line straight down the center of the canyon. The Florentine officials actually built some streets in the vicinity, like Elk, on the ridge of the bluff to the west, and Prospect, on the bluff to the east, which are called Thirty-Sixth Street and North Ridge Drive today. Clay and Fillmore, the cross streets, retain their original names on today’s maps, but they were not constructed, which is why I can almost afford to own my little piece of historic wilderness.

I long dreamed of being a landowner, as my maternal ancestors had been until the Depression. I wanted, too, land that was clearly historic, not just any land, but a parcel of property that had witnessed episodes in the epic of the American West. And it had to be land rich in quiet, spirit-refreshing, natural beauty. But six years

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ago I chose to buy a fine old Georgian mansion close to the university where I teach, and though because of its inner-city location it was not unusually expensive, the payments on its mortgage took enough of my professor’s salary that there was really nothing left over to spend on country property. It was just about certain that I could not afford a riverbank cabin, a lakeside summer home, or any sizeable chunk of forest or prairie. Nevertheless, after about three years in my house in town, which I did not want to give up, I began scrutinizing the real estate ads in the Omaha World Herald. A year went by, and I saw no rural land I could afford.

Then in the spring of 1988 came the announcement of an auction: a single lot, 66 by 140 feet, in Florence. I drove out to search for the address but found that 8834 North Thirty-Fourth Street existed in name only. The next morning I called the auctioneer. He had not been able to find the lot either, except on paper. But it had to be there, somewhere at the bottom of the ravine. The auction had been announced for 6:13 that evening. “Why at 6:13 exactly?” I asked, assuming that there was some obvious legal explanation I was too ignorant of real estate law to know. “Because I thought that time would arouse people’s curiosity,” he explained.

The time may possibly have aroused mild curiosity, but it did not attract purchasers. Before leaving for the auction, I promised my wife that I would go no higher than five hundred dollars in my bidding. Deep within, I feared that I’d be so caught up in the dramatic competition that I’d break my promise by two or three hundred dollars. My fear was unnecessary. No one else showed up for the auction, which was conducted in the front seat of the auctioneer’s Pontiac. I bought the lot. Price: one dollar.

No one else wanted this ridiculous piece of property on no road, with no utilities, in a part of the city with no significant development. But it had to be sold in order for its owners, sisters in their eighties, to receive government assistance with their nursing home bills. I would of course be responsible for five years of unpaid taxes, which now totalled eighty dollars, and there would be another hundred dollars in court costs.

It was the end of March, and the day after the sale I tramped through the ravine in search of my lot, a Xeroxed plat of Block 115 and an aerial photograph from the city planning department in my hands, my boots sinking to their insteps into the mud of earliest spring. Having decided upon an approximate location for the property, I went to the library to convince myself that the land was as historic as I had assumed it was when I first read of its address. Even without library research, I had known that Lewis and Clark
had passed by on the Missouri River less than half a mile to the east on their historic expedition in 1804 and 1805. Then the fur traders Manuel Lisa and Jean Pierre Cabanne and Peter Sarpy brought commerce to this area in succeeding decades, with the protection briefly of the soldiers of Fort Atkinson, ten miles or so to the north. Major Stephen Long had passed by as well, on his way to tell the world that this was the beginning of the Great American Desert, land that would be forever unfit for agrarian life. And my own ancestors in 1856 and 1857 had almost certainly gazed upon these bluffs from the decks of the steamboats taking them to their pioneer settlements in northeast Nebraska. But most significant of all, on this land, quite probably on my very two-tenths of an acre, the Latter-day Saints had paused for two years on their epic migration to the Great Salt Lake.

Their story was somewhat familiar to me. When my wife and I moved to Nebraska in 1967 from our first home in Washington, D.C., we had entered the state by crossing the Mormon Bridge to Florence. During our seventeen years of living three miles to the north, we heard and read much about the Mormon experience at Winter Quarters. Several times we took out-of-town guests to the cemetery where perhaps six hundred of the four thousand who lived on the west side of the river had been buried, victims of starvation, cold, and plague in the terrible years from 1846 to 1848. We knew that the Mormons here had been visited by the Indians Big Elk and Logan Fontenelle and by the famous Jesuit missionary Pierre DeSmet. Now I read more of these people, and of General George Crook, the Indian fighter who headed the Department of the Platte in the 1870s, just two miles to the South at Fort Omaha, where during World War I the army maintained its first and largest balloon school. I read, too, of Ponca Chief Standing Bear, who crossed this land with his tribe on their way to exile in Oklahoma, and who dared to come back to their homeland without government permission, an act whose ultimate consequence was the official recognition of an Indian's constitutional rights.

This was historic land, then, that I had purchased. If I listened, I told myself, I would hear the ghosts of these figures from history: the Jesuit, the explorers, traders, soldiers, Indians, and Mormons. But first I would get to know the nature of the land itself.

My lot was one of four on the western edge of Block 115. That first morning of my possession of it, brown leaves from the previous year still covered earth warming under a gradually strengthening sun. No foliage yet shaded the forest carpet, and no green shoots punctuated the dull colors of winter. Each afternoon for a week I drove out to work for an hour or two or three, opening
up trails with a variety of cutting tools, sometimes with just my hands, gloved usually, but not always. After a day of teaching and its concomitant reading and paper work, I relished the rhythm of mindless physical labor. My younger colleagues and much younger students expended their calories with the currently fashionable aerobic exercises to the sound of rock music; I preferred this exercise with its background chorus of the new season’s first robins. So I blistered my fingers and palms so ruthlessly that upon returning home one day I discovered I could not play the piano as I was accustomed to do each evening before dinner. So I let my thighs and hips and sometimes even the back of my neck or my face be whipped by stinging branches that left welts and scratches. I didn’t care. This was my piece of woods. It was a warm spring, and after a half hour of sawing, hacking, breaking, bending, stooping, and lifting and hurling brush and dead timber and thorny vines, I’d remove my jacket and then my shirt; soon my T-shirt was soaked with sweat, but I was working in my own paradise and could not stop.

In a week, as though in gratitude for my labors, the land responded with its first green. Instead of working, I could come out to my lot simply to enjoy it, to discover Dutchman’s britches and purple violets and myrtle. Soon the brown leaves on the ground were replaced by the leaves of woodbine and moonseed, of false Solomon’s seal and raspberry, columbine, and honeysuckle, and clouds of blue phlox. On a morning when fallen logs still glistened with frost and my breath turned to steam, I listened to hawks and blue jays, cardinals and orioles, crows and meadowlarks. By late April it was warm enough to take some books—histories of the Mormons, biographies of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, the diaries of Hosea Stout—and read in the sun on the canyon floor where towering burr oaks and black walnuts and cottonwoods still cast no leafy shadows.

By May these trees were shading my canyon, as earlier my hillside paths had been shaded by dogwoods, wild plums, and small elms. It was now necessary to take my books and blankets on free afternoons to the open meadow halfway up the hill to the east. This meadow was not on my land, as some of the paths I had cleared were not, but it would be. In the weeks since the auction, I had come to know the Douglas County Court House and its constituent parts, and what could be found in the treasurer’s office and in the offices of the clerk of the district court and the register of deeds. I found that no one had been paying taxes on most of the other lots on Blocks 114 and 115. No one was planning to use this land or to develop it. More important, it seemed, no one had decided to love it.
Buffalo Canyon

I searched through records, hoping to find owners who would let me pay their delinquent taxes and buy their lots for a price I could afford, fearing that owners could not be found, that the land was unsalable. Oh yes, I had been bitten not only by mosquitoes at Buffalo Canyon, but by the more deadly bug, greed. I made phone calls. A man who owned two lots would sell me his. So would another. Eight contiguous lots were registered in the name of a third owner, but he was deceased and his estate not settled. Among those eight, two comprised the meadow which by mid-May I had decided was essential to the character of my special place, and two others lay on either side of my first purchase. Dear God, I prayed, let those all become available!

By early summer I was back at my labors, stooping and whacking with a sickle, always careful to wear gloves, to eliminate the nettles and poison ivy that now threatened to overwhelm my trails. For a few weeks I had no classes to teach, and then six weeks of classes only until noon, and each afternoon I was out at the meadow with my blanket, a picnic jug of ice water, some suntan lotion, and books. Books on Mormons were succeeded by volumes on trees and wildflowers, and I would stroll my paths, pulling at branches to see if leaves were simple or compound, alternate or opposite, smooth-edged or toothed. I walked from silver maple to hackberry to basswood to red cedar, confident in the certainty of my identification. I searched for the eastern hop hornbeam that I knew had to be there, and worried over the difference between shagbark and bitternut hickory. I cursed in frustration when one book told me I was looking at a white mulberry and another said it was a red mulberry. Too many times I stupidly stabbed myself in an effort to distinguish the shorter thorn of the black locust from the longer one of the honey locust.

My study of the Buffalo Canyon flora depended on two sources: books and a local nature conservancy center, the privately owned Fontenelle forest. The major unit of the forest comprises one thousand acres of heavily timbered bluffs and bottomland just south of Omaha. A recent addition is a unit of smaller tracts of upland meadow and woods about two miles north of my land. Each unit has a resident naturalist, and when I was stumped by a leaf or a blossom not clearly identified in a book, I would take the specimen to him or her. When midsummer brought to my meadow wildflowers so showy that they would evoke pride in a serious backyard gardener, I took examples out to the young naturalist at the north unit, Neale Woods. It was almost closing time, but with a broad smile on his face he cheerfully wrote out both the English and Latin names of my treasures: wild bergamot or horsemint
(monarda fistulosa), tall bellflower (campanula americana), and purple vervain (verbena stricta). In the autumn I followed a young woman guide through the wetlands of the south unit to identify wingstem (actinomeris alternafolia), white snakeroot (eupatorium urticaefolium), and false boneset. Of course I knew my goldenrod and brown-eyed Susans, but she taught me how to pinch the tiny pods of the cunning jewelweed or touch-me-not to send seeds spurting out in an arc like intercontinental missiles. How insistent nature is in devising different ways to propagate her various species! Back I went to Buffalo Canyon with my wife, each of us trying to outdo the other in touching the touch-me-nots.

One of the most pleasant moments of the summer had come when I was using books to help me identify flowers. Lying prone on my blanket in the meadow, a book propped against the small rock I would eventually use as a pillow for an afternoon nap, I needed to move neither my torso nor my left arm as I reached out with my right and picked a blossom. I held it up against a photograph in the book. In size and color the flower and the photo matched exactly. The fact that I already knew the name Robin's plantain or daisy fleabane in no way diminished my joy. Let other citizens of Omaha savor their delight in BMWs and Porsches, in sailboats and video recorders and gilt-edged stocks: nothing could be more satisfying than what I was experiencing on my own piece of land! I rolled over and rubbed Coppertone on my chest, watching a hawk circling above in the deep blue sky. Buffalo Canyon was my paradise.

One reason it was so was the paradox that while it offered me the joy of country solitude, just two blocks to the east, on the bottomland below my bluff, stood a public library (the source of these books on history and trees and wildflowers—could anything be more deliciously convenient for a professor?), the offices of our family dentist and veterinarian, and buildings occupied by my wife's hairdresser, a druggist, a barber, and the state driver's license testing station. Adjacent to them were the gas station where I had my Plymouth serviced, a bowling alley, a hardware store, and a pizza parlor (locally owned, not part of a chain). Two more family restaurants, an ice cream stand, and a post office were no more than a ten-minute walk from the quietness of my canyon. And my old parish church: I'd been lector and cantor there, had written its diamond jubilee history; there at St. Philip Neri my children had made their first communions and been confirmed. Immediately east of my land was the building of the Florence Arts and Humanities Council, of which I had been president in 1981. This truly was my community, even if my residence was six miles due south.
Buffalo Canyon

Did I want history? Right here was the red brick building of the defunct Bank of Florence, erected in 1854, now a museum, as was the nearby depot of the abandoned Chicago, Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Omaha Railroad. But most historic of all, just beyond the brand new fire station, just beyond the spot where Brigham Young’s house once stood, a tiny, windowless shed-like structure leaned precariously towards the Missouri a hundred yards east. This was the mill erected by the Mormons in 1847, the only building left from the days of Winter Quarters.

Thus every day I congratulated myself on my decision to establish my “country place” where I did. *Rus in urbe* became my motto, country in the city. I would adopt another Latin phrase too: *otium cum dignitate*, leisure with dignity. I could stand beneath giant oaks in my canyon, certain that at least some of them had risen from this soil before the Mormons came. Surely Brigham Young himself had stood beneath one of these trees. And surely, one of these days, I would hear what he had to say.

But somehow on those halcyon afternoons he had nothing to communicate to me. Perhaps he was questioning an Indian or a soldier or even Father DeSmet himself about the best route across the Plains through the Rockies to the Great Salt Lake. I liked to imagine that, but as this was a subject irrelevant to my situation the Mormon leader made no effort to include me in his colloquies.

The fact was, my days were too painless, too hedonistic. The blisters I’d acquired with my fanatic hacking of paths in the spring had long healed and had never really been severe. I was no pioneer. I had sought out this canyon not as a step towards fulfilling a divinely ordained destiny for a whole people, but as a place for selfish escape, for sentimental romanticizing. Walt Whitman had written lines that I might appropriate: “I loaf, and invite my soul.” Brigham Young had no time for loafers. Imagine a middle-aged man stretched out on his back, watching as October inflamed the sumac and turned the ash and elms to gold, watching fat grasshoppers playing among the tall stalks of prairie clover. Oh, I had been practical enough to acquire four full acres by autumn, twenty more lots than I had in March, and I had learned the names of several dozen plants, but had Buffalo Canyon given insight, or truth, or wisdom?

My twenty-year-old son had forced me to do at least some rationalizing. He was going through his socialist stage: private property is theft. John was the later Tolstoy; his heroes were Gandhi and Thoreau and Martin Luther King. So I stressed to him that at Buffalo Canyon my intention was to protect the environment, to hold it in trust for posterity as an ecological laboratory. I’d planned
my trails in such a way as to avoid causing erosion. I cut no more trees than were necessary for the passage of one body from one place to another, or, following the example of famous eighteenth-century English landscape architect “Capability” Brown, to open up a charming vista.

And I engaged in intellectual wrestling matches with Ralph Waldo Emerson. A dozen years before I had written a modestly prize-winning play on the theme of his poem “Hamatraya,” which mocks landlords who think that because their names are recorded on deeds at a courthouse they therefore are truly the possessors of the earth. The very week I purchased the hilltop lots that gave me street access to my property, I assigned my literature students William Faulkner’s short novel The Bear, whose theme is, once again, that only the fatuous believe they can ever own the land God created for our stewardship.

And so I was cautioned by the voices of many, but for all my reading of Mormon history I heard nothing from Brigham Young. Thanksgiving came, and I gave thanks that I had a country place where my son and his friends could build a campfire and toast marshmallows and drink hot chocolate. I gave thanks for all the pleasure my family and I had enjoyed since I first purchased the single tiny lot at the auction in the front seat of an automobile.

But if I have implied that on balance the year had been a good one, one of happiness unalloyed, I have been misleading. It had, in fact, been a terrible year, I said to myself on the afternoon of Christmas Eve as I stood on my Buffalo Canyon hilltop gazing in silence across the Mill Creek valley to the gray-brown Ponca Hills to the north. It had been the most painful year in a decade, and its ending was positively black. In early March, my expected promotion to full professor, so long worked for, had been denied, a denial doubly crushing because it was a second one. Although the summer heat and drought that had so terribly hurt Midwestern farmers had not hurt me economically (I’d walked the brown lawns of Nauvoo in August trying to feel a Mormon-Buffalo Canyon connection in unbearable furnace-like heat), I’d been depressed to see my region’s land so burned and sere and my fellow citizens made worthless. Personally I had found the constant humidity so energy-sapping that I could not bring forth creative scholarship, thus postponing even more any chance of promotion. In the autumn, the novel I’d slaved over for half a dozen years was rejected by a New York agent who had earlier suggested it was a good one, wise and witty and salable.

Then there had been the burden of my father, whose stroke in late 1987 had left him with the mind of a five-year-old all through
1988. Only seventy-seven, he had lain every day in a tiny room in a nursing home, window drapes drawn at his insistence. In October he had fallen, dislocating a shoulder, and would probably never walk again. A six-footer, he now weighed a hundred and twenty pounds. He refused to watch television and could not understand the words in a large-print book, but organically he was sound as a Japanese yen. He would go on this way indefinitely, toothless, hollow-cheeked, and with no pension, his life’s savings having been used up in September. Since his stroke, I had been responsible for his pitifully small business affairs and had lain awake hundreds of nights contemplating the mountains of paperwork concerning his medical bills, his insurance, and ultimately, his acceptance as a welfare client. Each of my twice-weekly visits was an ordeal as I contrasted his pitiful condition with what he once had been.

Two other events, though, stood out as the tragedies of the year, and though they affected me only indirectly I stood on my hilltop on Christmas eve with a mood of weary resentment towards God. The afternoon was not cold, and the snowless hillside lay dull and brown. A pale sun neared the treetops across my canyon to the west as I thought of the twenty-two-year-old student at my university who had been found on the floor of his car, a suicide, just a few days before. A high school classmate of my son, he had been missing two weeks, having disappeared just before final exams from the apartment he shared with three other Creighton boys. On that night he had called one of my son’s best friends, hinting not at all of suicide. They had been dating on and off for a few months, and therefore in the days before his body was found she was summoned to the police station to be questioned for an entire afternoon, most of those hours in tears. Two hundred of the boy’s high school classmates formed a search party, scouring the city for his missing car. The FBI joined the case, but it was his cousin who discovered the body—with a plastic bag tied around his head. No one had suspected that the young man suffered something so terrible that he would consider self-destruction.

Then as Christmas drew nearer, a terrorist’s bomb sent Pan American Flight 103 plunging in flames into Lockerbie, Scotland, killing 280, among them thirty-eight students from Syracuse University. One of them was the sister of one of my daughter’s friends. Why, O Lord, does there have to be such suffering? Why have you put us in a world of so much cruelty and pain? What cause, I asked, have we to be joyous on December 25th, when our lives and the lives of those about us feel hurt so out of proportion to our yearning to do good?
For nine months now I had been coming to Buffalo Canyon. Never had my spirits been so low as they were this afternoon of the day before Christmas. I had health, and so did my wife and children; so many things were good for us, but I knew that all things were not good for so many others. Was living worth its cost in inescapable suffering?

For nine months I had told myself that Brigham Young had stood on this hilltop. He must have gazed wistfully, as I was gazing, at the beauty of the blue Iowa bluffs. But by now it had become clear that whatever he had spoken, whatever he had thought, simply had no relevance to me in 1988. Our situations were too different. He had played the leading part in a romantic historical pageant, and my life had nothing in common with his. The hum of trucks on the interstate highway across the valley proved that my modern world lacked any connection with the world of Mormon handcarts and sod-roofed cabins. For a long time I stood silent and alone, empty, sick at heart, grieving not just for myself but for the hopelessness of humanity, from Omaha to earthquake-devastated Armenia and around the globe back to Omaha again.

You’re ready to hear me now, Brigham Young said. You didn’t know us before, or really care about us. We were to you merely an element of local color, characters in a technicolor movie, a program of entertainment from Disneyland. You could use us to decorate your leisure hours by giving a patina of age to a piece of real estate you purchased. We were a tourist attraction, distracting attention from the easy ordinariness of your comfortable life. It is easy to step out for a moment from your air-conditioned or heated Plymouth to read words on a steel sign and then go away, saying, “It sure must have been tough in those days.” And so you knew nothing about me, really, however much you read as you lay browning in the summer sun in the meadow below us. I was standing here, beside these oaks and lindens, it is true, but what was in my heart you were not ready to hear. Now think of another Christmas Eve, and consider my agony, knowing that I had brought four thousand human souls to this place to endure hunger and cold so terrible that for one in ten, their bodies were rotting. Think of the black flesh, the burning fevers of my people, parents wasting away, babies limp and starving. Do you think that I never stood on this hill you claim as yours, and demanded of my Lord that he give me understanding of why obeying his will brought so great a heartache? And do you think he gave me no answer? If you do, come walk with me.

I felt not alone as I walked that late afternoon three blocks south on North Ridge Drive to the Mormon Pioneer Cemetery on
State Street. I stood for a few minutes looking at Fairbanks's heroic bronze statue of Mormon parents grieving over their child's grave, and finally to the west the sun seemed to grow grandly brighter as it touched the horizon, filling all the land around me with a golden glory.

And behold, I am the light and the life of the world; and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning. (3 Ne. 11:11)

It had taken nine months of visits to Buffalo Canyon to blend my soul with its holy history.

And the mourning, and the weeping, and the wailing of the people who were spared alive did cease; and their mourning was turned into joy, and their lamentations into the praise and thanksgiving unto the Lord Jesus Christ, their Redeemer. (3 Ne. 10:10)

Westward, westward towards the sunset Brigham Young had led them because for them the God of us all had a plan grander than any human mind could conceive. The plan included sickness and pain, poverty and hardship, but this afternoon I understood the glory of its fulfillment. Each of us, I realized, Mormon or Gentile, must suffer as God's Son suffered, almost to the point of despair. But always, I realized that Christmas Eve, there was sunset, and glory, and the promise of dawn.

I walked back to my land at Buffalo Canyon and got into my car. I turned on the radio, and though this seems too neat, too pat, a writer's trick, this is what actually occurred: as I drove down Clay Street to Thirtieth and what was once the center of the Winter Quarters of the Camps of Israel, I listened to the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's Messiah. It ended as I turned north toward the Mormon Bridge, and the announcer said, "You have been listening to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir."

And at last I had been listening to Brigham Young.
Landscapes of the Mind

A Portfolio of Paintings by Wulf E. Barsch

Wulf E. Barsch is a professor of art at Brigham Young University. He once called his paintings “landscapes of the mind,” and they are certainly that: symbolic, archetypal, brooding—and strikingly beautiful. Between 1966 and 1989 he mounted fourteen solo exhibitions and took part in 144 group exhibitions, including a 1969 solo exhibition at the Galerie Werkkunstschule, Hannover, West Germany; the 1983 Thirty-eighth Corcoran Biennial Exhibition of American Painting; and a 1986 exhibition at the Museo de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. His works hang in thirty-five permanent collections, including those at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; the Museo de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and the States Senate, Hamburg, West Germany. He received the 1975–76 Prix de Rome in painting, from the American Academy in Rome, Italy, and had two paintings chosen for the 1986 United States Department of State Art in Embassies Program. His works are reproduced in at least thirty-four catalogs and books. Brigham Young University Studies is pleased to reproduce six of his paintings in this issue.

Hugh W. Nibley writes of Barsch’s paintings: “There is nothing trivial, contrived, clever or cute about them; they seem more like a solemn summing-up, with something of both suspense and finality about them. . . . His work [has] deep sincerity that demands to be taken seriously. Strangely enough, with all his moving solemnity I find some of his things intensely romantic. The constant dialogue of the poplar and the palm is right out of the most ancient traditions of romantic poetry, whether Barsch is aware of it or not, with echoes from the Patriarchal Romances of Genesis. The poplar is the tree of the pioneers, marking their farms on all the benches and valleys from the red sands of Moencopi to the plains of Alberta. It is becoming rare as business supplants the noble windbreaks with billboards. And the palm evokes the wandering tribes of Israel . . . for it is their hope and succor in the desert.”

NOTES

2. Wulf Barsch: Looking toward Home, catalog for Looking toward Home: Recent Art by Wulf Barsch, an exhibition at the Museum of Church History and Art, Salt Lake City, 22 November 1985 to 13 April 1986 (Salt Lake City: Museum of Church History and Art, 1985), [xii–xiii].
Wulf E. Barsch, *Template*, oil on canvas, 60 by 48 inches.
Wulf E. Barsch, *Template for Adamantina*, oil on canvas, 36 by 72 inches.
Wulf E. Barsch, *The Gate*, oil on canvas, 60 by 90 inches.
Towards a Critical Edition of the Book of Mormon

Royal Skousen

Over the past few years the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (hereafter referred to as FARMS) has published a critical edition of the Book of Mormon in three volumes: 1 (1 Nephi–Words of Mormon, 1984), 2 (Mosiah–Alma, 1986), and 3 (Helaman–Moroni, 1987). During 1986–87 a second three-volume (corrected) edition was published. The purpose of this paper is not only to review the FARMS Book of Mormon Critical Text, but also to discuss some of the general problems that arise when trying to establish a critical text of the Book of Mormon. In this review article I will discuss the need for a critical edition of the Book of Mormon, consider the issue of Joseph Smith's "bad grammar," review the FARMS Book of Mormon Critical Text, and propose an alternative critical edition for the Book of Mormon.

Before considering these issues, I will first address the question of exactly what a critical edition is. Simply put, a critical edition is composed of two main parts, the critical text itself and an apparatus (consisting of notes at the bottom of the page, below the critical text). Usually the critical text attempts to represent the original form of the text, while the apparatus shows the textual variants and their sources. The editors of the critical edition decide which textual variant best represents the original and put that in the critical text. The apparatus shows all the (significant) variants of the text and the sources for those variants (manuscripts, published texts, and conjectures). The apparatus thus allows the reader to evaluate the decisions of the editors.

This kind of critical text is said to be eclectic because the text itself is derived from a number of different sources. The critical text for the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament is of this eclectic type.

Royal Skousen is a professor of English at Brigham Young University. The author expresses thanks to Grant Boswell, Lyle Fletcher, Don Norton, Kent Jackson, and Richard Anderson for reading earlier versions of this article; to Lyle Fletcher for providing important information and helpful discussions which clarified key ideas; and to Richard Anderson for providing copies of some original documents.
Another possibility is to have the critical text represent a single textual source, even though that source may contain textual errors or less preferred textual variants. In this case the apparatus will note other readings, some of which may be preferred over the reading in the text. The Stuttgart Hebrew Bible is an example of this second type of critical text; its text is based on a single Hebrew manuscript, the Leningrad manuscript (c. A.D. 1008 or 1009). 

THE NEED FOR A CRITICAL EDITION

In establishing the text of the Book of Mormon, we have two manuscripts as well as a number of important printed editions. Joseph Smith dictated the Book of Mormon to several scribes, chiefly Oliver Cowdery, and the resulting manuscript is usually referred to as the original manuscript (O). Oliver Cowdery then made a copy of the original manuscript. This second manuscript is usually referred to as the printer’s manuscript (P) since this copy was used by the printing firm of E. B. Grandin to set the type for the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. Unfortunately, only about a fourth of the original manuscript exists, but the printer’s manuscript is virtually extant. Since the printer’s manuscript is not an exact copy of the original manuscript, a critical edition of the Book of Mormon will undoubtedly have an eclectic text.

There are several reasons for creating a critical edition of the Book of Mormon. For one, a good deal of statistical work has been done in trying to identify the characteristic style of various authors in the Book of Mormon. The goal of such work has been to demonstrate that the Book of Mormon truly represents the work of multiple authors. The validity of such statistical analyses may well depend on the text the analyses are based on. For example, a good many occurrences of the phrase “and it came to pass that” have been reduced to simply “and” in later editions of the Book of Mormon. This deletion distorts the original frequency of occurrence for this phrase, thus making it a less reliable indicator of stylistic differences than if one uses a critical text as a basis for statistical analyses.

Another reason for having a critical edition of the Book of Mormon is to facilitate studies of linguistic influences. Numerous studies have been made on the question of Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon. Yet it turns out that the original text actually contained a number of potential Hebraisms that have been removed by later editing. Consider, for instance, the use of and after a conditional clause and before the main clause, as in Moroni 10:4 (according to the printer’s manuscript and the 1830 edition):
“and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, and he will manifest the truth of it unto you.” (In quotations, italics are added to help identify the words in question.) In the 1837 and all later editions, this and has been deleted. Yet this use of and is possibly a Hebraism, as in Judges 4:20:

\[ \text{'im } '\text{is yâbâ’ } '\text{ûšè'ělek wê'amar} \]
\[ \text{if anyone comes and asks and says} \]
\[ \text{hâyês } pōh '\text{is} \]
\[ \text{is there there anyone} \]
\[ \text{wê'âmart } '\text{ayin} \]
\[ \text{and you will say there isn’t} \]

In other words, “If anyone comes and says, ‘Is anyone there?’ you will say, ‘No, there isn’t.’ ”

Another possible example of a removed Hebraism occurs in 1 Nephi 3:17, where the original and printer’s manuscripts (as well as most early printings of the Book of Mormon) have the phrase “for he knowing that Jerusalem must be destroyed.” The use of the present participle knowing rather than knows can be interpreted as a Hebraism. Consider a similar expression in Genesis 3:5:

\[ \text{ki } yōdēa' 'elôhîm kî} \]
\[ \text{for knowing God that} \]

The present participle form yōdēa' is tenseless and can be literally translated as either “is knowing” (that is, “knows”) or “was knowing” (that is, “knew”). Given the context of Genesis 3, this expression should be translated into standard English as “for God knows that.” Similarly in 1 Nephi 3:17, the context implies that if knowing is to be rendered in standard English, it should be knows rather than knew. Yet later editing of the Book of Mormon has replaced the original knowing by the past tense knew rather than the present tense knows:

And all this he hath done because of the commandments of the Lord. For he knew that Jerusalem must be destroyed, because of the wickedness of the people. For behold, they have rejected the words of the prophets. (1 Ne. 3:16–18, 1981 ed.)

This emendation leads to a strange shift of tenses, from the present perfect (“hath done”) to the simple past (“knew”), then back to the present perfect (“have rejected”). Moreover, Nephi is speaking here to his brothers long before Jerusalem was ever destroyed. By replacing the original knowing with knows, the passage (as determined by the original manuscript) reads exactly right:
And all this he hath done because of the commandment of the Lord, for he knows that Jerusalem must be destroyed because of the wickedness of the people. For behold, they have rejected the words of the prophets.

Knowing conjecture) knowing O P 1830 1837 1841 1849 1852, knew 1840 1879&

(In the above apparatus, I first give the form as it appears in the proposed emended text—that is, knows—followed by its evidence. The right bracket is used to separate the text form from other variants. In this example there are two variants. The first one, knowing, is found in the original manuscript O, the printer’s manuscript P, and in most of the earlier printings. The second variant, knew, is first found in the 1840 printing, then later in the 1879 printing and in all subsequent printings, which is represented by 1879 followed by an ampersand.)

When we compare the biblical quotes in the Book of Mormon with the King James Version (KJV) as well as ancient biblical texts, our conclusions are affected by which Book of Mormon text is chosen. For example, in a number of cases later editors of the Book of Mormon have made changes in the Isaiah passages in order to attain better agreement with the KJV text of Isaiah. Some examples:

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<th>MOS 1649</th>
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<th>MOS 1712</th>
<th>MOS 1830</th>
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<td>2 Nephi 13:18</td>
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<td>16:8</td>
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<td>17:1</td>
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(Here the plus + refers to an addition, > refers to a replacement, and φ stands for the null symbol—that is, the sequence “> φ” refers to a deletion.) Or the opposite has occurred: later editors have made changes in the Book of Mormon text that make the current text differ from the KJV:

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<th>MOS 1649</th>
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<th>MOS 1830</th>
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<tr>
<td>2 Nephi 16:6</td>
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<td>16:9</td>
<td>understand &gt; understood</td>
<td>1837</td>
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<td>16:10</td>
<td>convert &gt; be converted</td>
<td>1837</td>
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<td>16:13</td>
<td>in it &gt; φ</td>
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A critical edition of the Book of Mormon is needed, further, because there are still textual errors that have thus far escaped correction. For example, consider an error that occurred in producing the printer’s manuscript from the original manuscript. In 1 Nephi 8:31 the original manuscript reads prssing (that is, pressing), but this was mistakingly copied as feeling in the printer’s manuscript:
And he also saw other multitudes pressing their way towards that great and spacious building.

pressing O <pressing>] feeling P 1830&

In all other passages in this chapter the text has press or pressing and not feel or feeling, as in verse 30: "he saw other multitudes pressing forward . . . and they did press their way forward continually." Similar uses of press and pressing occur in verses 21 and 24. This use of press parallels New Testament usage, as in Philippians 3:14 (KJV): "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." As in Lehi’s dream, numerous New Testament passages also use the word press to describe individuals trying to work their way through crowds (for example, Mark 2:4; Luke 8:19, 19:3). In fact, except for this textual error in 1 Nephi 8:31, there is no scriptural use of the phrase “to feel one’s way.”

Yet another reason for a critical edition of the Book of Mormon is that there has been considerable editing throughout its many printings, and sometimes this editing has introduced errors into the text. In addition to the example of interpreting knowing as knew in 1 Nephi 3:17, consider the following emendation in Mormon 8:28 (1981 edition):

Yea, it shall come in a day when the power of God shall be denied, and churches become defiled and be lifted up in the pride of their hearts; yea, even in a day when leaders of churches and teachers shall rise in the pride of their hearts, even to the envying of them who belong to their churches.

Earlier this passage read as follows (based on the printer’s manuscript):

yea, it shall come in a day when the power of God shall be denied, and churches become defiled and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts; yea, even in a day when leaders of churches and teachers in the pride of their hearts, even to the envying of them who belong to their church . . .

(The caret refers the reader to the place in the text where a variant has been later inserted.) In order to eliminate the sentence fragment, the phrase "shall rise" was added in the 1911 edition. Yet a more appropriate emendation would be to insert the parallel “shall be lifted up,” which occurs in the previous sentence: “and churches become defiled and shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts.”

The editing of the Book of Mormon has been fairly extensive. A more accurate critical edition will allow the reader to note not only the grammatical and other changes that have been made in the text but also when they were first introduced. Many of the changes have eliminated archaic language that is typical of the KJV:
shew > show:
which the Lord had shewn unto him (1 Ne. 1:15) > shown (1911)
compare: which thou hast shewed unto me (Gen. 19:19)

which > who(m) (when the referent is human):
and my elder brethren, which were Laman, Lemuel, and Sam (1 Ne. 2:5) > who (1837)
compare: and Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks (Gen. 13:5)

exceeding > exceedingly (adverb preceding adjective):
it was exceeding great (1 Ne. 3:25) > exceedingly (1981)
compare: thy exceeding great reward (Gen. 15:1)

do > ø (nonemphatic modal in positive declarative sentences):
they did as he commanded them (1 Ne. 2:14) > did (1837)
compare: and did wipe them (Luke 7:38)
a > ø (preverbal prepositional a):
the armies of the Lamanites are a marching towards the city of Cumeni (Alma 57:31) > ø (1837)
compare: I go a fishing (John 21:3)

that > ø (preceded by a subordinate conjunction):
because that he was a visionary man (1 Ne. 2:11) > ø (1837)
compare: because that in it he had rested (Gen. 2:3)
after that I have abridged the record of my father (1 Ne. 1:17) > ø (1837)
compare: then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him (Matt. 18:32)

how > what (relative pronoun preceding adjective):
how is it that ye have forgotten how great things the Lord hath done for us (1 Ne. 7:11) > what (1837)
compare: tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee (Mark 5:19)

sayeth, saith > said (historical present occurring in the Greek New Testament and the KJV):
the Lord spake unto my father . . . and sayeth unto him (1 Ne. 2:1) > said (1837)
compare: immediately his leprosy was cleansed and Jesus said unto him (Matt. 8:3–4)

change in preposition:
let us be faithful in him (1 Ne. 7:12) > to (1837)
compare: for this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son and faithful in the Lord (1 Cor. 4:17, KJV)
removing mixup of *sit* and *set*:
upon which I never had before *sit* my foot (1 Ne. 11:1) > *set* (1849)
compare: when he was *set* down on the judgment seat (Matt. 27:19, KJV)
the king *sat* him down to eat meat (1 Sam. 20:24, KJV)

*for* > *Ø* (preceding the infinitive marker):
after their many struggles *for* to destroy them (Alma 27:1) >
to (1837)
compare: all their works they do *for* to be seen of men (Matt. 23:5)

Of course, some (but not all) of these expressions can be found in Joseph Smith's colloquial language. For instance, in his 1832 statement on how he translated the Book of Mormon he wrote: "but the Lord had prepared spectacles *for* to read the Book."\(^\text{12}\)

The Book of Mormon also contains numerous switches between the traditionally singular *thou* and *thee* and the traditionally plural *ye* and *you*, as in Alma 37:37:

Counsel the Lord in all *thy* doings, and he will direct *thee* for good;
yea, when *thou* liest down at night, lie down unto the Lord, that he
may watch over *you* in *your* sleep; and when *thou* risest in the
morning, let *thy* heart be full of thanks unto God; and if *ye* always do
these things, *ye* shall be lifted up at the last day.\(^\text{13}\)

But this mixing of the second person pronouns should not be interpreted as ungrammatical. Rather, pronominal variation is a characteristic of many writers from Middle English through Early Modern English. Lyle Fletcher has emphasized this point. In chapters 3 and 4 of his thesis, he identifies many examples of such variation:\(^\text{14}\)

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (c. 1370–90)

Bot *ge* schal be in *yowre* bed, burne, at *thyn* ese!
(line 1071)\(^\text{15}\)

Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales* ("Wife of Bath's Prologue") (c. 1390)

Com neer, my spouse, lat me ba *thi* cheke!
*Ye* sholde been al pacient and meke . . .
(lines 433–34)\(^\text{16}\)

Shakespeare also has examples of pronominal mixing:\(^\text{17}\)

Artemidorus: *If thou* beest not immortal, look about *you*.
(*Julius Caesar*, act 2, sc. 3, line 7 [1599])\(^\text{18}\)

In fact, the Bible itself contains many examples of switching between the singular and plural forms, even in the original Hebrew
and Greek texts. This variation is reflected, for example, in the King James translation of the following two passages:

When *thou* shalt beget children, and children's children, and *ye* shall have remained long in the land, and shall corrupt *yourselves*, and make a graven image, or the likeness of any thing, and shall do evil in the sight of the Lord *thy* God, to provoke him to anger . . . (Deut. 4:25)

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto *thee*, how often would I have gathered *thy* children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and *ye* would not! (Matt. 23:37)

Moreover, the original King James Version itself had "errors" in the use of the second person pronouns; these "errors" were removed in later printings of the KJV (mainly in the 1760s), long after *thou*, *thee*, and *ye* had dropped out of standard English.19

Despite the prevalence of pronominal variation in the Bible and English literature, editors of the Book of Mormon have altered some of these pronouns, as in these examples from 1 Nephi:

3:29  *thou shalt* go up to Jerusalem again and the Lord will deliver Laban into your hands > *ye shall* (1837)

7:8  *thou art* mine elder brethren > *ye are* (1840)

An analysis of the grammatical changes that various editors have introduced into the Book of Mormon text shows that most of the changes eliminate language characteristic of the King James Version of the Bible. Yet few would criticize the "bad grammar" of the KJV or suggest that the KJV should be "cleaned up" grammatically or stylistically in the same way. One suspects that later editors have unknowingly removed King James expressions from the Book of Mormon under the mistaken idea that they were simply correcting grammatical errors.

Of course, some of these "errors" are not found in the King James Bible, but are representative of Joseph Smith's language. And, of course, editors have worked to eliminate these "errors" as well. Consider, for instance, the many attempts to make the archaic pronouns and verbal endings conform to their original historical usage:

because of the most plain and precious parts of the gospel of the lamb which *hath* been kept back (1 Ne. 13:34) > *has* (1837) > *have* (1841)

Nephi's brethren *rebelleth* against him (1 Ne. introductory summary) > *rebel* (1920)

Other types of grammatical "errors" have also been removed from the Book of Mormon text:
changes in the use of the irregular be verb:
thy power and goodness and mercy is over all the inhabitants of the earth (1 Ne. 1:14) > are (1837)
they was yet wroth (1 Ne. 4:4) > were (1830)

simple past tense forms replaced by past participle forms:
I had smote (1 Ne. 4:19) > smitten (1830)
I had slew (1 Ne. 4:26) > slain (1830)
my father had read and saw (1 Ne. 1:14) > seen (1920)
the Lord hath protected my sons and delivered them out of the hands of Laban and gave them power (1 Ne. 5:8) > given (1920)

them > those (in modifying position):
the tender mercies of the Lord is over all them whom he hath chosen (1 Ne. 1:20) > those (1837)
this shall be your language in them days (Hel. 13:37) > those (1837)

number agreement:
we had obtained the record which the Lord had commanded us and searched them (1 Ne. 5:21) > records (1852)

word change:
it was desirous above all other fruit (1 Ne. 8:12) > desirable (1837)

*Oxford English Dictionary* (OED):
desirous (definition 5) = ‘desirable’
sample OED citation (from John Gay, *The Beggar’s Opera*, first performed in 1728): “Wine inspires us, And fires us . . . Women and Wine should Life employ. Is there ought else on Earth desirous?” (act 2, sc. 1)²⁰

Of course, this process of “cleaning up” a text is a never-ending one, since there are differences over what is acceptable usage. For the overly prescriptive, there are still grammatical “errors” in the Book of Mormon:

sentence ends in a preposition:
God is mindful of every people in whatsoever land they may be in (Alma 26:37) > of (1840)
(The 1840 deletion of the first in eliminates the original repeated preposition, but still allows the sentence to end in a preposition.)

split infinitive (not yet removed):
it is that same being who put it into the heart of Gadianton to still carry on the work of darkness (Hel. 6:29)
Besides grammatical editing, there has been a good deal of stylistic editing:

attempt to remove potential ambiguity:

he pitched his tent in a valley beside a river of water (1 Ne. 2:6)  
> by the side of (1837)

agreement of modals:

that we might preserve unto our children the language of our fathers and also that we may preserve unto them the words which have been spoken (1 Ne. 3:19) > may (1837)

count nouns changed to mass nouns:

and also of the seeds of fruits of every kind (1 Ne. 8:1) > fruit (1840)

avoiding a (potential) multiple negative:

and I have not written but a small part of the things which I saw (1 Ne. 14:28) > a (1920)

avoiding the subjunctive were when referring to future time:

he spake unto them concerning the Jews how that after they were destroyed (1 Ne. 10:2–3) > should be (1837)

Finally, there are examples of direct addition to the text:

avoiding potential misunderstandings:

me thought I saw ^ a dark and dreary wilderness (1 Ne. 8:4) >  
in my dream (1837)

clarifying doctrinal issues:

the virgin which thou seest is the mother of ^ God (1 Ne. 11:18) > the Son of (1837)

editorial comments:

and are come forth out of the waters of Judah ^ (1 Ne. 20:1) >  
(or out of the waters of baptism) (1840)

"TIGHT" OR "LOOSE" CONTROL  
OVER THE TRANSLATION?

This supposed problem of grammatical "errors" leads directly to the question of whether the Book of Mormon text represents the Lord’s actual language to Joseph Smith or simply Joseph Smith’s own translation using his own language. In other words, does the Book of Mormon represent a direct and exact revelation from the Lord, or did the ideas come into Joseph’s mind and then he put them into his own words? If the revelation was specific and exact, then there would definitely be some value in
having a text that would directly represent the original language. Of course, from a linguistic point of view, a reader might adopt the second position—that the specific language of the Book of Mormon is not directly from the Lord—but still wish to have the text in Joseph Smith’s own “impure” and “ungrammatical” language.

It might be worthwhile to consider in more detail the question of loose versus tight control over the translation. There is evidence both for and against the idea of tight control.

Evidence for Tight Control

Statements on how the translation proceeded. Unfortunately, neither Joseph Smith nor Oliver Cowdery have told us much on how the translation took place. But four firsthand statements by observers and participants show remarkable agreement:21

Joseph Knight (between 1833 and 1847): Now the way he translated was he put the urim and thummim into his hat and Darkened his Eyes then he would take a sentence and it would apper in Brite Roman Letters. Then he would tell the writer and he would write it. Then that would go away the next sentence would Come and so on. But if it was not Spelt rite it would not go away till it was rite, so we see it was marvelous. Thus was the hol translated.22

Emma Smith (1879): In writing for your father I frequently wrote day after day, often sitting at the table close by him, he sitting with his face buried in his hat, with the stone in it, and dictating hour after hour with nothing between us. Q. Had he not a book or manuscript from which he read, or dictated to you? A. He had neither manuscript nor book to read from. Q. Could he not have had, and you not know it? A. If he had anything of the kind he could not have concealed it from me. Q. Are you sure that he had the plates at the time you were writing for him? A. The plates often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in a small linen table cloth, which I had given him to fold them in. I once felt of the plates, as they thus lay on the table, tracing their outline and shape. They seemed to be pliable like thick paper, and would rustle with a metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb, as one does sometimes thumb the edges of a book. Q. Where did father and Oliver Cowdery write? A. Oliver Cowdery and your father wrote in the room where I was at work. Q. Could not father have dictated the Book of Mormon to you, Oliver Cowdery and the others who wrote for him, after having first written it, or having first read it out of some book? A. Joseph Smith could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter; let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon. And, though I was an active participant in the scenes that transpired, and was present during the translation of the plates, and had cognizance of things as they transpired, it is marvelous to me, “a marvel and a wonder,” as much so as to any one else.23
David Whitmer (1887): Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principal scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear.

Elizabeth Anne Whitmer Cowdery Johnson (David Whitmer’s sister, Oliver Cowdery’s wife; 1870): I cheerfully certify that I was familiar with the manner of Joseph Smith’s translating the book of Mormon. He translated the most of it at my Father’s house. And I often sat by and saw and heard them translate and write for hours together. Joseph never had a curtain drawn between him and his scribe while he was translating. He would place the director in his hat, and then place his face in his hat, so as to exclude the light, and then . . .

All four accounts mention an instrument of translation in a hat. All refer to Joseph Smith’s ability to dictate extensively without using the gold plates or any other physical text. On the other hand, we cannot automatically accept everything in these statements. The testimonies of these witnesses are only valid with respect to what they actually witnessed. They obviously saw Joseph Smith translating, but they could not actually know what Joseph himself saw in the hat since they themselves did not translate.

Spelling of names. David Whitmer and Joseph Knight both refer to control over the spelling, but this seems to be only true for the spelling of names in the Book of Mormon. In an 1875 interview, Whitmer said that Joseph Smith’s spelling out words was restricted to names, that Joseph “was utterly unable to pronounce many of the names which the magic power of the Urim and Thummim revealed and therefore spelled them out in syllables, and the more erudite scribe put them together.” Actually, Joseph Smith probably spelled out names letter by letter rather than syllable by syllable (although it is quite possible that David Whitmer used the term “syllable” to mean “letter,” the smallest unit of writing).

This spelling out of names is also supported by Emma Smith in an 1856 interview:

When my husband was translating the Book of Mormon, I wrote a part of it, as he dictated each sentence, word for word, and when he came to proper names he could not pronounce, or long words, he spelled them out, and while I was writing them, if I made a mistake in spelling, he would stop me and correct my spelling, although it was
impossible for him to see how I was writing them down at the time. Even the word Sarah he could not pronounce at first, but had to spell it, and I would pronounce it for him.29

This spelling out of names would explain, for example, why Nephi is spelled with ph and not f, or why so many names in the Book of Mormon end in the letter i, a rather rare spelling in English for a final vowel in multisyllabic words.

Nonetheless, it also appears that Joseph Smith did not continue to spell frequently occurring names, with the result that spelling variation of hard-to-spell names (like Amalickiah) does occur in the manuscripts. But for most names in the Book of Mormon there is little or no variation. It is obvious from the manuscripts that spelling variation of common words was allowed. But there does seem to be spelling control over at least the first occurrence of Book of Mormon names.

Semitic textual evidence. In a number of his books, Hugh Nibley has provided many examples of Semitic and other Near Eastern names and phrases in the Book of Mormon.30 The phrases give evidence for control at the word level, while once more the names provide evidence for spelling control. As an example, Nibley argues that the ph spelling of the name Nephi shows an Egyptian influence.31 We also have the work of John W. Welch on chiasmus in the Book of Mormon.32 His examples demonstrate a tight control on the order of specific words and phrases.

In addition, there are some very interesting textual relationships between Book of Mormon passages and corresponding biblical passages. Consider, for instance, the case of the missing the in 2 Nephi 13:18–23:

In that day the Lord will take away the bravery of tinkling ornaments, and caulds, and round tires like the moon; the chains, and the bacelets, and the mufflers; the bonnets, and the ornaments of the legs, and the headbands, and the tablets, and the earrings; the rings, and nose jewels; the changeable suits of apparel, and the mantles, and the wimples, and the crisping pins; the glasses, and the fine linen, and hoods, and the veils.

(Here the text is based on the printer’s manuscript and the 1830 edition.) When we compare this passage with the corresponding verses in Isaiah 3 (KJV), we note that the occurrences and nonoccurrences of the little word the are identical, except that the Book of Mormon has the missing before hoods at the end of verse 23. Of course, this missing the does appear in the Masoretic text (the traditional Hebrew Bible), but interestingly it is missing in a number of textual sources: in the Vatican version of the
Septuagint and (according to the apparatus in the FARMS *Book of Mormon Critical Text*) in some of the catena quotations from the Septuagint, in the Syriac text, and in the Aramaic Targums. Of all the *the*’s that could have been “accidentally” deleted in this long list, Joseph Smith comes up with the one that is missing in part of the biblical textual tradition.

EVIDENCE FOR LOOSE CONTROL

The most common argument against tight control is that Joseph Smith’s grammar is bad:

*B. H. Roberts*: If the Book of Mormon is a real translation instead of a word-for-word bringing over from one language into another, and it is insisted that the divine instrument, Urim and Thummim, did all, and the prophet nothing—at least nothing more than to read off the translation made by Urim and Thummim—then the divine instrument is responsible for such errors in grammar and diction as occur. But this is to assign responsibility for errors in language to a divine instrumentality, which amounts to assigning such errors to God. But that is unthinkable, not to say blasphemous. Also, if it be contended that the language of the Book of Mormon, word for word, and letter for letter, was given to the prophet by direct inspiration of God, acting upon his mind, then again God is made responsible for the language errors in the Book of Mormon—a thing unthinkable.

*Richard L. Anderson*: But many anti-Mormons have seized on the implications of going further: that is, if Joseph Smith only dictated divinely given English from his viewing instrument, then God is the author of some bad grammar in the original.

These arguments assume that the Lord speaks only “proper” English, not Joseph Smith’s own language. But which variety of “proper” English does God speak? The King’s English, Received Pronunciation, Network English, the English of some contemporary grammar guru, or according to the usage of Orson Pratt, James E. Talmage, or Bruce R. McConkie? There is no evidence that God himself prefers one variety of English over another (or, for that matter, one language over another). In fact, there is evidence that the Lord would have spoken to Joseph Smith in Joseph’s own language:

Behold, I am God and have spoken it; these commandments are of me, and were given unto my servants in their weakness, after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding.

(D&C 1:24)

This same view was expressed by George A. Smith, first counselor to Brigham Young:
The Book of Mormon was denounced as ungrammatical. An argument was raised that if it had been translated by the gift and power of God it would have been strictly grammatical... When the Lord reveals anything to men He reveals it in language that accords with their own. If any of you were to converse with an angel, and you used strictly grammatical language he would do the same. But if you used two negatives in a sentence the heavenly messenger would use language to correspond with your understanding, and this very objection to the Book of Mormon is an evidence in its favor.36

A number of writers have referred to D&C 9:8 in support of loose control:37 "You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right." But the phrases "study it out in your mind" and "you shall feel that it is right" do not necessarily imply a loose control over the text. Joseph Smith had to "study it out in his mind" till he got it right!

Related to this interpretation is the belief that Joseph Smith used his King James Bible to help him translate biblical passages.38 Yet there is no direct evidence for this proposal; in fact, it is contradicted by Emma Smith's statement that Joseph "had neither manuscript nor book to read from." Given the statements of those who observed the translation, it seems more reasonable that it was the Lord himself who chose to quote from the King James Version when it agreed with the Book of Mormon.

Finally, we must recognize that Joseph Smith permitted editing of the Book of Mormon. In fact, he is probably directly responsible for many of the editorial changes that are found in the second and third editions. The title page of the 1837 edition states that this edition was "corrected by Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery." In addition, Parley P. Pratt and John Goodson, in the preface to this edition, explain: "the whole has been carefully reexamined and compared with the original manuscripts, by elder Joseph Smith, Jr. the translator of the book of Mormon, assisted by the present printer, brother O. Cowdery, who formerly wrote the greatest portion of the same, as dictated by brother Smith." And in the 1840 edition the title page indicates that the text has been "carefully revised by the translator."

But there is another way to interpret the grammatical editing of the Book of Mormon—namely, Joseph Smith allowed the Book of Mormon to be "translated" from its original language into standard English. In other words, Joseph Smith was perfectly willing to let the Book of Mormon appear in another variety of English (that is, standard English), just as the Church today is
willing to translate the scriptures into English-based pidgins and creoles (and numerous other languages) so that "every man shall hear the fulness of the gospel in his own tongue and in his own language" (D&C 90:11).

THE FARMS BOOK OF MORMON CRITICAL TEXT

The FARMS critical edition is an important accomplishment. It represents a tremendous amount of work, and we are indebted to FARMS and especially Robert F. Smith, the compiler and editor, for preparing it. Anyone who is interested in the original text of the Book of Mormon or in its editorial history can profit from the FARMS Book of Mormon Critical Text. Most important, this critical edition marks the first time in the history of the Book of Mormon text that the general reader can find evidence for how the text has changed over time and evaluate alternative readings of the text.

The FARMS Book of Mormon Critical Text brings together a wealth of information important to any textual study of the Book of Mormon. Consider the sample reproduced as figure 1 on page 57.

The FARMS Book of Mormon Critical Text can be characterized as follows:

1. the text is completely capitalized;
2. each line of the text contains a single phrase (as in the Washburn Bible\(^{[9]}\)), which implies some kind of punctuation or an indication of a clause or phrase ending;
3. no regular punctuation marks (or even apostrophes) occur in the text (which makes sense since the original and printer's manuscripts originally had virtually no punctuation);
4. the pagination and chapter headings from the 1830 edition are included in square brackets in the text; the symbol \(\|$\) represents the original 1830 paragraphing;
5. the left margin refers to the standard chapter and verse numbers; the speaker is also identified;
6. the text contains raised footnote numbers that refer the reader to the apparatus;
7. the text contains special symbols (for example, *, @, #) that refer the reader to suggested dates listed at the bottom of the page;
8. the apparatus contains different kinds of notes (textual variants, scriptural cross-references, and commentary), sometimes combined in the same footnote;
9. textual variants from all major editions are referred to by means of a lemma system (that is, a reference system that repeats "the text in full in the apparatus before indicating the variant forms, each one in full"\(^{[9]}\)).
1 Nephi

1 01:01 a NEPHI:NIST
1: NEPHI HAVING BEEN BORN OF GOODLY PARENTS
THEREFORE I WAS TAUGHT SOMETHING IN THE COURSE OF MY DAYS
NEVERTHELESS HAVING BEEN HIGHLY FAVORED OF THE LORD
IN ALL MY DAYS
YEAL HAVING HAD A GREAT KNOWLEDGE OF THE GOODNESS AND THE MYSTERIES OF GOD.
THEREFORE I MAKE A RECORD OF MY PROCEEDINGS IN MY DAYS
WHICH CONSISTS OF THE LEARNING OF THE JEWS
AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE EGYPTIANS
AND I KNOW THAT THE RECORD WHICH I MAKE TO BE TRUE
AND I MAKE IT WITH Mine OWN HAND
* FOR IT CAME TO PASS IN THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF JUDAH KING OF JUDAH MY FATHER LEHI HAVING DWELT AT JERUSALEM IN ALL HIS DAYS

27. cf Ps 18:6, Jer 3:19, "goodly heritage" (KJ v marg rdg: "an heritage of glory." "...beauty!").
28. cf Enos 1, Mosiah 9:1, Alma 5:3.
29. 11:1 1:28, "highly favoured, the Lord is with thee"; favored P 1830 1837 1840 1841 1920 1981, LDS 1908; favoured 1852 1879.
30. the P 1830 1837 1840 1852 1879 1920 1981, LDS 1908; deleted 1911TCC typo.
32. cf Acts 7:22, "Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians."
33. to be P 1830: is P 1837 1840 1852 1879 1920 1981, LDS 1874 1908.
34. 1 III 25:18; cf Jn 8:14, "my record is true"; 19:35. 21:24: I: Jn 12, "and ye know that our record is true."
36. It came to pass (1398 times in BofM/ 388 in 07/ 65 in NT); cf 14:1.
37. first year of the P 1830 thru 1908, LDS 1874 1908; not in P; cf II Ki 24:27-8.

Fig. 1. 1 Nephi 1:1, reproduced from the FARMS Book of Mormon Critical Text.
The FARMS *Book of Mormon Critical Text* is an important beginning: having the text before us with editorial decisions already made permits us to evaluate these editorial decisions and consider alternative ways of representing the critical text. But as in all critical editions of important documents, the first edition is in many respects preliminary. With this idea in mind, let us consider some aspects of the critical text that might be improved.

PROBLEMS WITH THE FARMS
*BOOK OF MORMON CRITICAL TEXT*

The text is sometimes difficult to read. The use of only capital letters in the text is the main cause of difficulty, making it look too much like old-fashioned computer printout. (In fact, the text was constructed from an early computer-based text of the 1830 edition; FARMS decided it was too difficult to convert the text into normal lower and upper case.)

Sometimes the lack of standard punctuation, especially the missing apostrophes, causes difficulty in reading the text. Consider the following example from Alma 46:24:

**EVEN AS THIS REMNANT OF GARMENT OF MY SONS**

The modern reader readily interprets this as the plural *sons*, yet the context shows that Jacob is speaking of his son Joseph. So the correct form should be *son’s*. (In fact, *sons* appears in both O and P, with the consequence that in printed editions before 1849, *sons* rather than *son’s* occurred.)

Quoted passages are full of symbols that interfere with the readability of the text. Consider the page for 2 Nephi 13:6–10, which quotes from Isaiah 3 (see figure 2 on page 59).

The date system also interferes with the text, sometimes creating unintended “words,” such as *aways* (see figure 3, a reproduction of 3 Nephi 1:26, on page 59).

Occasionally a raised footnote interferes with the preceding line. In the following example, a raised 730 footnote makes *FULLFILED* look like *FULLEILED* (see figure 4, a reproduction of 3 Nephi 20:12, on page 59).

Of course, these problems are trivial. But there is a very serious difficulty with the FARMS *Book of Mormon Critical Text*: it relies heavily on secondary sources and not on a systematic examination of the original manuscript. The FARMS *Book of Mormon Critical Text* is based on John L. Hilton’s and Kenneth D. Jenkins’s computerized text of the Book of Mormon, a text constructed by comparing the 1830 edition with the printer’s
AND LET (NOT) THIS RUIN (COME) UNDER THY HAND
IN THAT DAY SHALL HE SWEAR SAYING
I WILL NOT BE (A) HEALER
FOR IN MY HOUSE (THERE) IS NEITHER BREAD NOR CLOTHING
MAKE ME NOT A RULER OF THE PEOPLE
FOR JERUSALEM IS RUINED
AND JUDAH IS FALLEN
BECAUSE THEIR TONGUE(S)
AND THEIR DOINGS
(HAVE BEEN) AGAINST THE LORD
TO PROVOKE THE EYES OF HIS GLORY
THE SHEW OF THEIR COUNTENANCE
DOTH WITNESS AGAINST THEM
AND (DOOTH) DECLARE THEIR SIN (TO BE EVEN) AS SODOM
(THEM) THEY (CAN) NOT HIDE IT
WOE, UNTO THEIR SOUL(S)
FOR THEY HAVE REWARDED EVIL UNTO THEMSELVES
SAY, (UN)TO THE RIGHTEOUS
THAT IT (IS) WELL WITH (THEM)
FOR THEY SHALL EAT THE FRUIT OF THEIR DOINGS

Fig. 2. 2 Nephi 13:6–10, reproduced from the FARMS Book of Mormon Critical Text.

AND THUS THE NINETY AND SECOND YEAR DID PASS AWAY

Fig. 3. 3 Nephi 1:26, reproduced from the FARMS Book of Mormon Critical Text.

WHEN THEY SHALL BE FULFILLED
THEN IS THE FULLFILLING OF THE COVENANT

Fig. 4. 3 Nephi 20:12, reproduced from the FARMS Book of Mormon Critical Text.
manuscript. About a fourth of the original manuscript is extant, but unfortunately Hilton and Jenkins decided to ignore the original manuscript in constructing their text:

For most accurate “wordprint” testing we would want Joseph’s dictated Book of Mormon words. These are of course not available nor is the original written manuscript, since it was mostly destroyed. Therefore the “Printer’s” manuscript, a hand written copy of the first written manuscript is presumed to be the next closest complete extant text.\(^{41}\)

Of course, portions of the original manuscript are available. Nor can we assume that the printer’s manuscript is an exact copy of the original manuscript. The printer’s manuscript introduces many changes, although most of these differences deal with spelling and capitalization.\(^{42}\) The FARMS *Book of Mormon Critical Text* does include evidence from the original manuscript, but this evidence is largely based on secondary sources, such as Stan Larson’s master’s thesis,\(^{43}\) and a selective reading of the original manuscript.

A systematic comparison of the original manuscript with the printer’s manuscript and the printed editions of the Book of Mormon provides a number of substantial differences that are completely missing from the FARMS *Book of Mormon Critical Text*. In these examples the FARMS text follows the printer’s manuscript and makes no mention of the original reading. Consider the following sampling from the small plates of Nephi—first the correct text based on the original manuscript and then the change that occurred in making the printer’s manuscript:

*First Nephi*

2:11 and this they said *that* he had done > ∅
2:16 wherefore I *cried* unto the Lord > *did cry*
7:1 the Lord spake unto him again ^ > *saying*
7:1 his sons should take daughters to wife that ^ might raise up seed > *they*
13:12 I looked and beheld a man among the Gentiles which *were* separated from the seed of *my* brethren > *was*
13:24 it contained the fulness of the gospel of the Lord of whom the twelve apostles *bore* record and they *bore* record according to the truth > *bear, bear*
13:26 which is the most abominable of all other churches > *above*
15:36 whose fruit is . . . most desirable of all other fruits > *above*
17:50 if he should command me that I should say unto this water be thou earth and it *shall* be earth > ∅, *should*
18:11 the Lord *suffered* it > *did suffer*
20:6 thou hast *heard* and *seen* all this > *seen and heard*
22:8 it is likened unto the being *nursed* by the Gentiles > *nourished*\(^{44}\)
Critical Edition

Second Nephi

1:5 the Lord hath consecrated this land unto me > covenanted
(compare v. 7: "this land is consecrated unto him")

These changes, all scribal errors, entered the textual tradition when
Oliver Cowdery made the printer's manuscript, with the result that
these errors are found in every printed edition of the Book of
Mormon. These errors also occur in the FARMS Book of Mormon
Critical Text because it too does not rely on a systematic reading of
the original manuscript. 45

Problems with the Apparatus

The apparatus system in the FARMS Book of Mormon Critical
Text is frequently confusing, especially when the lemma refer-
encing system combines variants to save space. The referencing
system needs to keep variants separate in order to facilitate the
counting of different types of variation. Consider this example
from Alma 47:34:

AND ALSO THEY WHICH 331 WERE WITH HIM

331. also they which O P 1830; also they who P0; all they who
1837 thru 1911TCC, RLDS 1908; all them who 1920 1981 (all
typo).

Three separate changes are involved in this example:

which to who in the 1837 and all subsequent editions
also to all, a misreading that entered in the 1837 edition and is found
in all subsequent editions
they to them, a usage change in 1920 and in the subsequent 1981
edition

Sometimes the lemma system in the apparatus is difficult to
decipher. For example, textual insertions can be misinterpreted as
cases of replacement, as in 1 Nephi 1:11:

AND BADE HIM THAT HE SHOULD READ 50

50. should read P 1830 thru 1981, RLDS 1908; it P0; cf Alma 56:48.

The word it is added after should read; it does not replace should
read.

Finally, the apparatus needs to refer to possible variations in
punctuation. Consider Alma 42:16 from the second edition of the
FARMS Book of Mormon Critical Text:
NOW REPENTANCE COULD NOT COME UNTO MEN 
EXCEPT THERE WERE A PUNISHMENT 
WHICH ALSO WAS ETERNAL 
AS THE LIFE OF THE SOUL SHOULD BE 
AFFIXED OPPOSITE TO THE PLAN OF HAPPINESS 
WHICH WAS AS ETERNAL ALSO 
AS THE LIFE OF THE SOUL

The phrasing of the text implies the punctuation “as the life of the soul should be, affixed.” This punctuation occurs in all printed editions of the Book of Mormon. On the other hand, the first edition of the FARMS Book of Mormon Critical Text phrases this passage so that “should be” goes with “affixed” rather than “soul”:

WHICH ALSO WAS ETERNAL AS THE LIFE OF THE SOUL 
SHOULD BE AFFIXED OPPOSITE TO THE PLAN OF HAPPINESS

In other words, the text of the first FARMS Book of Mormon Critical Text implies a different punctuation: “soul, should be affixed.” This is undoubtedly correct, especially in light of the last phrase in the verse: “which was as eternal also as the life of the soul.” In any event, the critical edition must show important punctuation variants such as this one.46

But the most serious difficulty with the apparatus is that not all the variants are marked. The editing of the Book of Mormon has not been completely consistent, and therefore by only giving a sampling of the variants, the FARMS Book of Mormon Critical Text makes it impossible to accurately study the language and textual development of the Book of Mormon. As an example of this problem, consider the massive 1837 change of nearly all cases of which to who(m) or that when the referent is a human being. One example that is marked in the FARMS Book of Mormon Critical Text comes from the Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi 13:9 (compare Matt. 6:9):

OUR FATHER WHICH447 ART IN HEAVEN 
447. which P 1830 (=KJ); who Pc 1837 thru 1981, RLDS 1908.

But many other cases of changing which to who(m) or that are left unmarked in the FARMS Book of Mormon Critical Text.47 For example, in Alma 43:11 we have two examples of this:

YEA AND THEY ALSO KNEW 
THE EXTREME HATRED OF THE LAMANITES 
TOWARDS THEIR BRETHREN 
WHICH WERE THE PEOPLE OF ANTI NEPHI LEHI 
WHICH WERE CALLED THE PEOPLE OF AMMON

<no apparatus>
Correspondingly, in some cases the reader might think this change has been made, but in reality it hasn’t. In the following example from Alma 22:1, the probable reason for leaving *which* unchanged is that editors have interpreted the referent to be “the house of the king” rather than “the king”:

> HE WAS LED BY THE SPIRIT TO THE LAND OF NEPHI
> EVEN TO THE HOUSE OF THE KING
> WHICH WAS OVER ALL THE LAND

<no apparatus>

Other confusing examples of unchanged and unmarked *which*’s can be found in Alma 46:27, 49:23; 3 Nephi 10:2.

Another example of confusion occurs in Alma 5:25. In this verse the original phrase “such an one” was simplified to “such” beginning in the 1837 edition, yet the same phrase was left untouched in verses 24, 28, 29, and 31 of the same chapter. The probable motivation for the change in verse 25 is the plural referent that occurs later on in that verse:

24 DO YE SUPPOSE THAT SUCH AN ONE CAN HAVE A PLACE
25 YE CANNOT SUPPOSE THAT SUCH AN ONE269 CAN HAVE PLACE
   IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN270
   BUT THEY SHALL BE CAST OUT
28 AND SUCH AN ONE HATH NOT ETERNAL LIFE
29 FOR SUCH AN ONE IS NOT FOUND GUILTLESS
31 WO279 UNTO SUCH AN ONE

To be consistent all examples of “such an one” should have been changed to “such.” Unfortunately, the reader of the FARMS *Book of Mormon Critical Text* cannot be confident that other examples of “such an one” were not also changed to “such.”

The reader of a critical edition needs to be sure about the possible variants. The solution is to mark every change that can be considered a significant variant. (Since one of the main objectives of the proposed critical edition is to produce a text that represents as closely as possible what Joseph Smith dictated, a variant’s significance will be determined by variance from what Joseph Smith dictated.) In this way, the reader can be sure that if the apparatus contains no indication of variance, then there is no significant variance in the text. Moreover, the marking of each variant allows for an accurate calculation (for example, by computer) of the frequency of different variants; it also permits the reader to locate all the places where a particular change has been made, as well as all the places where it hasn’t.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A SECOND CRITICAL EDITION

I would submit the following goals for a critical edition of the Book of Mormon: first, readability of the text; second, establishment (to the degree possible) of the original text of the Book of Mormon as dictated by Joseph Smith; and third, an apparatus that contains all the significant variants in the manuscripts and the important editions. These goals lead to the following specific recommendations:

(1) The variants listed in the apparatus should be restricted to the manuscripts and major editions: (a) those that involved Joseph Smith (O, P, 1830, 1837, 1840); (b) subsequent printings for the LDS church which established readings that have persisted (1841, 1849, 1852, 1879, 1905, 1911, 1920, 1981), as well as the important RLDS 1908 edition (which relies heavily on the printer’s manuscript). We can probably ignore insignificant and idiosyncratic textual variants (such as obvious typos) that have not persisted.

(2) The critical text should reflect Joseph Smith’s language, as far as it can be determined. The major sources for determining Joseph Smith’s language will, of course, be the original manuscript and the printer’s manuscript. Generally, variants from the published editions (including later editorializing) will appear in the apparatus.

(3) There is a need for an accurate collation of textual evidence. Rather than relying on visual comparison, the collation should be established by use of a computer. First, both the original and printer’s manuscripts should be transcribed independently by at least two different individuals, then the consistency of their transcriptions should be checked by computer. Second, the printed editions should be put into computable-readable form (by the Kurzweil or some other text-reading system). Finally, the computer should be used to find all the textual variants in the manuscripts and printed editions. (A transcript of each of the manuscripts should be published, and these and the major editions should be on computer for future detailed study, so the critical edition can be limited to textual variants of significance to avoid the tedious task of including every spelling variant or typographic error.)

(4) In order to establish the critical text, an important study will be to compare the printer’s manuscript with what remains of the original manuscript. At least three main correctors (or editors) have worked on the printer’s manuscript: Oliver Cowdery (the scribe), John H. Gilbert (the compositor for the 1830 printing), and
the editors of the 1837 edition. It is particularly important to know how frequently the corrections in P restore the text of O. A careful comparison will then allow us to determine the general reliability of corrections in P when O is lacking.

(5) Conjectures will normally appear in the apparatus. In a few cases, conjectures may appear in the text, but only when no reasonable explanation for the manuscript form can be maintained and the conjecture is well motivated.

(6) In order to improve the readability of the critical text, standard spellings should be used as long as those spellings make no difference in recovering Joseph Smith’s language. Some spellings in the manuscripts which reflect no (perceived) pronunciation differences should occur in the apparatus. For instance, Alma 34:39 would read as follows:

that ye may not be led away

led O 01 P1 1830 &] lead O P

(Numbers after O and P refer to the corrector. P1 refers to the first corrector of the printer’s manuscript—that is, the corrector for the 1830 edition. On the other hand, P2 will refer to the correctors for the 1837 edition.)

(7) The text should reflect Joseph Smith’s language. We should include his “bad” grammar and those spellings that might represent his (or possibly his scribes’) pronunciation. Some examples of such spellings include the following:

GRIEVIOUS /grívias/ ‘grievous’ (Mosiah 7:15)
ARIVEN /ærivan/ ‘arrived’ (Mosiah 10:15)
FRAID /fréid/ ‘afraid’ (Alma 47:2)
MELCHESIDEK /mɛlkɛzdιk/ (still pronounced this way in the LDS church) ‘Melchizedek’ (Alma 13:17)
MASSACRED /mɛsəkrid/ ‘massacred’ (Alma 48:24)
ATTACKTED /ətæktd/ ‘attacked’ (Alma 59:5)
DROWNDED /drɔnɔd/ ‘drowned’ (1 Ne. 4:2)
GOVERNMENT /gəvərnənt/ ‘government’ (Alma 60:24)
HEIGHT /hɛйт/ ‘height’ (Hel. 14:23)

(The pronunciation symbols are based on the International Phonetic Alphabet.)

(8) The margins should contain the following helps: (a) biblical references when the Book of Mormon quotes directly from the Bible; (b) page numbers from the 1830 edition.

(9) In order to enhance readability, the text should be written in the standard text style of today. Both upper and lower case should
be used, with standard capitalization of names and sentence-initial words. The chapter and verse numbers of the current 1981 edition can be put in the margin (or perhaps in an unobtrusive form within the text). The text should be set in paragraphs (but not necessarily the paragraphing of the 1830 edition).

(10) Again for reasons of readability, the text should avoid the use of critical marks. Compared to the New Testament textual tradition, the textual variance in the Book of Mormon is not that extensive. The apparatus itself can refer directly to the text, as in Alfred Rahlfs’s Septuaginta.48

(11) The 1920 and 1981 chapter descriptions should be ignored. Only the descriptions that Joseph Smith actually dictated should be included (for example, the summary that introduces 1 Nephi). The headings added to the top of the pages in the original manuscript can also be ignored.

(12) The punctuation should basically follow the 1981 punctuation except in cases where other punctuation may be more reasonable; the apparatus should refer to cases of punctuation that make a difference in meaning.

(13) There should be no commentary in the apparatus, except as it helps to establish the text. No dates should be listed since this is a form of commentary. Determining the critical text is a well-defined task, but providing commentary is an open-ended process and is continually subject to revision. Extensive biblical and scholarly references belong in commentaries, not in critical texts. Undoubtedly, a helpful companion to the critical edition would be a textual commentary, much like Bruce M. Metzger’s one for the Greek New Testament of the United Bible Societies.49

(14) The text itself should contain no indication of how it compares to the King James Version. Instead, textual comparisons with the KJV should be restricted to the apparatus. In fact, I propose a separate apparatus for comparisons with the KJV and biblical manuscripts, especially since these sources play no direct role in determining the original text of the Book of Mormon.

In conclusion, I provide two examples of the proposed critical edition. First, we have the opening of 1 Nephi.
1:1 I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents, therefore I was taught somewhat in all the learning of my father; and having seen many afflictions in the course of my days, nevertheless, having been highly favored of the Lord in all my days; yea, having had a great knowledge of the goodness and the mysteries of God, therefore I make a record of my proceedings in my days. Yea, I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jew and the language of the Egyptians.

2 And I know that the record which I make to be true; and I make it with mine own hand; and I make it according to my knowledge.

3 For it came to pass in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah (my father, Lehi, having dwelt at Jerusalem in all his days); and in that same year there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed. Wherefore it came to pass that my father, Lehi, as he went forth prayed unto the Lord, yea, even with all his heart, in behalf of his people.

4 And it came to pass as he prayed unto the Lord, there came a pillar of fire and dwelt upon a rock before him; and he saw and heard much; and because of the things which he saw and heard he did quake and tremble exceedingly.

1:3 to be P 1830] is P2 1837& || 4 of the first year P1 1830&]

o P 1 the P1 1830&] that P

Second, we have a passage from 2 Nephi which quotes from Isaiah. In this second example, I provide two apparatuses; the first gives the textual evidence, the second the KJV comparison. In the comparison I first list the Book of Mormon form, then the King James form.

13:9 The shew of their countenance doth witness against them, and doth declare their sin to be even as Sodom, and they cannot hide it. Woe unto their souls, for they have rewarded evil unto themselves! Say unto the righteous that it is well with them; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked, for they shall perish; for the reward of their hands shall be upon them!

<textual apparatus>


<KJV comparison>

NOTES


2 Incredible as it may seem, when FARMS first announced the publication of its critical text of the Book of Mormon, a national wire service reported that a text critical of the Book of Mormon had just been published (John W. Welch, personal communication).

3 In producing a text, an author may go through a number of drafts and later revisions until a final version is obtained. In such a case, the “original” form of the critical text usually refers to this finished text, not the first draft.


6 Lucy Mack Smith, Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations (Liverpool: S. W. Richards, 1853), 142–43. Nonetheless, there is evidence that others helped Oliver Cowdery in producing the printer’s manuscript: not all of the printer’s manuscript is in his hand (see Richard P. Howard, Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development [Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1969], 27).

7 The surviving portions of the original manuscript are from 1 Nephi 2 through 2 Nephi 1 and from Alma 22 through Helaman 3, all with lacunae. In addition there are fragments from 2 Nephi 4–5; Alma 10–13, 19; and 3 Nephi 19–20, 26–27. For a summary of the textual sources for the Book of Mormon, see Lyle L. Fletcher, “Pronouns of Address in the Book of Mormon” (Master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1988), 233–51.


9 For example, in Mosiah 24, four out of eleven occurrences of this phrase have been removed (at the beginning of verses 11, 12, 20, and 25). See also Stanley R. Larson, “A Study of Some Textual Variations in the Book of Mormon Comparing the Original and the Printer’s Manuscripts, and the 1830, the 1837, and the 1840 Editions” (Master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1974), 267; and Howard, Restoration Scriptures, 38.


11 See Fletcher, “Pronouns of Address,” 249–51.


13 The text of this passage is based on the original and printer’s manuscripts; later editors have not altered the switching between thou and ye in this passage.

14 Fletcher, “Pronouns of Address,” 61, 71.

15 Ibid., 61.

16 Ibid., 71.

17 Ibid., 92–103.

18 Ibid., 94.

19 Ibid., 166–93.


22 Written between 1833 and 1847 (the year of Joseph Knight’s death); Dean C. Jessee, “Joseph Knight’s Recollection of Early Mormon History,” BYU Studies 17 (Autumn 1976): 35.


24 David Whitmer, An Address to All Believers in Christ (Richmond, Mo.: Privately printed, 1887), 12.

25 Charles Anton, in two different letters (written in 1834 and 1841), discussed Martin Harris’s visit to him in February 1828. He claims that Harris said Joseph Smith translated from behind a curtain. In 1842 the Reverend John Clark claimed that Martin Harris told him in the fall of 1827 that while translating Joseph Smith used a thick curtain or blanket to separate himself from Martin Harris, who was acting as scribe (see Milton V. Backman, Jr., Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration [Orem, Utah: BYU Studies)
Grandin Book Co., 1983], 209, 213, 215, 218). Early on in the translation, Joseph Smith quite probably used a curtain while translating, especially if he was translating directly from the gold plates, since at that time no one was permitted to see the plates.

The rest of this 1870 statement is missing. For the quote, see John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone, "The Translation of the Book of Mormon: Basic Historical Information," preliminary report (Provo: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1986), 25.


See the second definition of syllable in the OED: "the least portion or detail of speech or writing."

Welch and Rathbone, "The Translation of the Book of Mormon," 8. According to another account of this same interview, the name was Sartah, Lehí’s wife (ibid., n. 22).


Nibley, Lehi in the Desert, 27.


See the note to Isaiah 3:23 in Alfred Rahlf’s, Septuaginta (1935; reprint, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979).


George A. Smith, Journal of Discourses 12:335 (15 November 1863).


See the comparison (albeit somewhat inaccurate) of the original and printer’s manuscripts in Howard, Restoration Scriptures, 29–35.

See n. 9.

Here Nephi is referring to the Isaiah passage that he has just quoted (1 Ne. 21:23, Isa. 49:23): "and kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers."

This same criticism applies to Stan Larson’s master’s thesis. None of these errors are mentioned in Larson’s thesis.

For another example, consider the possible punctuation for the word continually in 1 Nephi 8:30.

In the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi alone contains 86 changes of which to who(m) or that, yet only 15 of these changes are noted in the FARMS Book of Mormon Critical Text: who, 13 out of 78; whom, 2 out of 6; that, 0 out of 2 (Lyle Fletcher, personal communication).

See n. 33.

The Twentieth Maine Regiment at Gettysburg

On the first, second, and third, the trident
Of the blood's Poseidon sank deeper, afresh
To the sea of its origin, and when, godsent,

It became the standard in Lincoln's flesh,
It sank again more firmly, for sallow troops
Prayed as penitents, wielding sleeve and mesh

Of arms, with bayonets, frantically in loops
Of mind, arresting and recovering to hold
A yard of rock or ground where the will droops

Only into mire and lesion.
A blade will mold

In time, if kept there, wet in misting sun:
The fragrant hill below, where peaches fall,
The lip of leaves, the broken lines that run

Into ditches, the weaving and irrupting pall
Of smoke, the riband near a rose, the trickle
Of dew, the twinge of thorn, and the dying call

Of a horn. There the dull gray robe and sickle
Prevail as the finger feels a fragile spear
Of bone. Who were they of the bronze and nickel

Medals who received canister and shot at the angle,
Devoid of power that flamed the face? They railed
Into death, fumbling the flags of war that dangle

Now from stakes. Off white and dimly unassailed,
The monuments stand where the dying, once impaled
In weeds, flourish into the air of another century

As yield of newer orders and in Christ are nailed
Into lengths of rhetoric that seem less than fury,
Less than insurgency, and less than incidental worry.

—Clinton F. Larson

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Thomas Bullock
as an Early Mormon Historian

Jerald F. Simon

Thomas Bullock was intimately associated with leaders of
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for more than
twenty-five years. He served twenty-one years in the Church
Historian’s Office and also clerked in many city, county, and
territorial positions, acting as scribe, clerk, and personal secretary
to Joseph Smith, Jr., Brigham Young, Willard Richards, and the
Council of the Twelve. During this time he was privy to important
events of late Nauvoo and early Utah Mormon history. His was a
critical role not only in recording the history, but also in gathering
and preserving historical documents. Bullock frequently referred
to himself as a man who was “doing my duty,”7 and he surely
fulfilled in his life the revelatory injunction: “It is the duty of the
Lord’s clerk, whom he has appointed, to keep a history, and a
general church record of all things that transpire in Zion” (D&C
85:1). This essay will focus on how well Thomas Bullock fulfilled
the duties he was given, particularly as they relate to his contribu-
tions to Mormon historiography.

When Joseph Smith, Jr., was celebrating his eleventh birth-
day, across the ocean in Leek, Staffordshire, England, Thomas
Bullock was born on 23 December 1816, the ninth child of Thomas
Bullock and Mary Hall.2 Very little is known about his early
childhood. He attended school and was considered to be the
second-best scholar in his class when he left school at age thirteen
to become a clerk in the law office of John Cruso in 1830.3 Bullock
worked there until 1838 when he was hired as an excise officer. In
this capacity he inspected and rated articles liable to excise tax,
sometimes calling himself “One of Her Majesty, Queen Victoria’s
Officers of Excise.”4 He was small in stature and occasionally
referred to as “little Tommy Bullock.”5

Bullock married Henrietta Rushton, also of Leek, on 23 June
1838, after at least five years of courting.6 They were baptized into
the LDS church three years later on 20 November 1841.7 Bullock

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continued as an exciseman and labored as a lay missionary for the Church before departing for America on the ship *Yorkshire* in March 1843. En route to America, he prophesied that "the hull of this old vessel" would carry them safely to New Orleans. The vessel nearly capsized in a storm as the masts snapped in two, leaving nothing but the hull, but they completed the voyage, boarding the steamboat *Amaranth* at New Orleans and arriving at Nauvoo, Illinois, on 31 May 1843.\(^8\)

In the late fall of the same year, Bullock was employed as a clerk to Joseph Smith. He served as a letter copyist, clerk of the April 1844 general conference, clerk of the steamboat *Maid of Iowa*, and clerk of the Nauvoo Masonic lodge. In Nauvoo he later labored as deputy city recorder, clerk to Church Historian Willard Richards, and clerk of the Council of Fifty, a position he held from 1846 to 1882.\(^9\) On 25 January 1846, Thomas Bullock married a second wife, Lucy Clayton, sister of William Clayton, another noted clerk, recorder, and secretary to Church leaders.\(^10\)

As a trusted observer, Bullock was assigned by Brigham Young to remain and record the events of the last days in Nauvoo after the main body of Saints departed during the freezing exodus of February 1846. Bullock’s 1845-46 Nauvoo diary clearly depicts the dismal demise of the "City Beautiful."\(^11\) In the fall of 1846, after the remnants of Nauvoo had been driven to the west bank of the Mississippi River, it was Thomas Bullock’s pen that recorded in greatest detail the miracle of the quail and the westward migration of the "poor camp."

When Bullock arrived at Winter Quarters, he continued his duties for Brigham Young and the rest of the Council of the Twelve. He was chosen as clerk of the vanguard company of pioneers that departed for the Great Salt Lake Valley in April 1847. In August of the same year, he continued as clerk for the company returning to Winter Quarters. The following spring he served as a clerk of the company headed by Brigham Young.

Bullock continued his labors in behalf of the Church and community in the Salt Lake Valley. He drew plats of the city for the land office, assisted in the establishment of the monetary system used in the valley, was the first proofreader for the *Deseret News*, served as recorder for the Perpetual Emigrating Fund, chief clerk of the Territorial House of Representatives, census taker, Salt Lake County recorder, inspector of liquors for the territory, clerk for Brigham Young’s exploration parties, and secretary of the Nauvoo Legion of Utah (rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel prior to his mission call to England in 1856). In addition, he wrote an *Emigrant’s Guide*, was president of the Twenty-Seventh Quorum
of Seventies, helped divide the valley into wards, was instrumental in copying and creating maps of the region, and continued clerking for Brigham Young and the Council of the Twelve. He also helped organize the first Utah library and was a member of the Deseret Theological Institute and home secretary of the Deseret Horticultural Society. He was frequently consulted on horticultural matters. He was also involved with the pioneer theater as a prompter, was an ardent reader, served on the Board of Regents of the University of Deseret, and was appointed by the board to examine schoolteachers. From 1856 to 1858 he served as a missionary in his native land of England.

Bullock married a third wife, Betsy Prudence Howard, on 9 December 1852. He was the father of twenty-three children, though only thirteen lived to adulthood. After his mission he continued working in the historian’s office until 1865 when he was assigned to work in the courts and county government in Summit County. He served as Summit Stake clerk, historian, and general recorder from 1879 to 1885. On 10 February 1885, Thomas Bullock passed away at his Coalville home without prolonged illness at the age of sixty-eight.

Before examining Thomas Bullock’s role as a Mormon historian, it would be well to briefly review American historiography from 1840 to 1860 when Bullock’s main contributions were rendered. Then his contributions can be interpreted against the backdrop of this era.

The earliest attempts at historical writing in the New World were initiated by the Puritan religious leaders. A strong sense of dependence upon and acknowledgment of divine intervention were prevalent themes in the seventeenth century. By the late eighteenth century, European historical writers were being influenced more by the ideas of the Enlightenment; the advance of machines, particularly printing presses; and the beginnings of humanism. Early nineteenth-century American historians were fired with a patriotic zeal and a deep love for this land, yet many were also influenced by ideas from abroad. From about 1775 to 1830, some American historical writers were affected by the Germanic influence of historicism, the belief that “anything in the present must be understood primarily in terms of its historical development, the belief that the past makes and is the primary means of understanding the present.” Another German influence was Volkgeist, the idea that “a distinct history... create[s] a distinct people.” American historians such as Jared Sparks, Francis Parkman, Washington Irving, William H. Prescott, and George Bancroft combined these ideologies with a concern for the relatively short
time period of American history, which resulted in historical writings emphasizing stronger patriotic bonds and neglecting most historical writings outside of the New World.

Nevertheless, as feelings of nationalism swelled and as a sense of destiny grew, the pens of the patriotic historians were instrumental in forging a unique history of America. These historians valued common sense and maintained an awareness of divine providence in their writings, an approach that "never fully embraced Enlightenment skepticism."\(^{18}\) Most of them viewed their work as a meaningful service for their contemporaries and for posterity as well. Historians of this era have since been referred to as "patricians" because patriotism was in part the purpose of their preservation of the past.

The people of the new nation seemed to thrive on discovering portions of the past. Historical books became best-sellers, newspapers frequently carried chronicles of yesteryear, and historical and genealogical societies grew and flourished, particularly after 1836, the year the ancient prophet Elijah visited the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Kirtland Temple and restored the keys of "turning the hearts of the children to their fathers."\(^{19}\) Antiquarianism, the collecting and studying of historical documents, rose dramatically.

American historical writers of the early nineteenth century were interested in making their histories read as smoothly as the novels of the great authors of the era, particularly emulating the likes of Sir Walter Scott. Like novelists, they emphasized character development. They were generally college educated, mature men with time and leisure, and money was not the major motivating factor in their historical writing.\(^{20}\) Besides history, some of their reading interests were poetry, novels, and plays. History as an academic study was a fledgling field, and university-educated historians would not emerge in America until late in the century. While the earlier nineteenth-century historical writers espoused the virtues of "honesty, accuracy, and thoroughness," they also practiced plagiarism and used literary license to alter or conjure up events to make the story flow.\(^{21}\) They tended to favor minutely developed scenes and long, flowing sentences. They not only corrected grammatical "errors," but sometimes developed speeches or comments from fragments of phrases to portray the historical figure in what they thought the best way possible. As Callcott writes, "until about the time of the Civil War . . . people trusted that a careful editing not only made documents more interesting to the reader and fairer to the original author but also more accurate in recreating the past."\(^{22}\) There was little perceived difference between an author and a compiler or editor.
When The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized on 6 April 1830, the Lord instructed the Saints that “there shall be a record kept among you” (D&C 21:1). This was more easily said than done, as enduring persecutions, moving to Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois, going on missions, building temples, providing for basic needs, and avoiding mobs were but a few of the numerous intrusions that deterred the work. In keeping with the practice of the time, Joseph Smith called various clerks who functioned as literary or historical editors. When John Whitmer was assigned to “write and keep a regular history” in March 1831, he was promised the Church history was to “be given him, inasmuch as he is faithful, by the Comforter” (D&C 47:1, 4). Eight months later, Whitmer was told to “continue in writing and making a history of all the important things . . . writing, copying, selecting, and obtaining all things which shall be for the good of the church, and for the rising generations” (D&C 69:3, 8; see vv. 1-8). Similar counsel was rendered in November 1832, expanding the scope of the clerk’s “duty” to include keeping records of “apostates who apostatize after receiving their inheritances.” Church clerks would know what to record because it would again be given by “the still small voice, which whispereth through and pierceth all things” (D&C 85:2, 6; see vv. 1-6).

As the practice of baptism for the dead was commencing in Nauvoo, it was revealed, “let there be a recorder, and let him be eye-witness of your baptisms. . . . That in all your recordings it may be recorded in heaven” (D&C 127:6-7; see also 128:3). To Joseph Smith the command to “keep a record” took on additional meaning after 1838, when he stated, “If I now had in my possession, every decision which had been had upon important items of doctrine and duties since the commencement of this work, I would not part with them for any sum of money.” After his incarceration at Liberty Jail during the winter of 1838-39, Joseph Smith gave a greater emphasis to the injunction to “keep a history.” Previously his clerks had assisted in the translation of the Book of Mormon, the bringing forth of the Book of Commandments, and had kept numerous local Church records and personal papers in Kirtland and Missouri. In 1839 Joseph began dictating his personal history to clerk James Mulholland. He later testified, just before his death, as recorded by Bullock, one of his concerns about the history:

For the last three years I have a record of all my acts and proceedings, for I have kept several good, faithful, and efficient clerks in constant employ: they have accompanied me everywhere, and carefully kept my history, and they have written down what I have done, where I have been, and what I have said; therefore my enemies cannot charge
me with any day, time, or place, but what I have written testimony to prove my actions; and my enemies cannot prove anything against me.\textsuperscript{25}

It is characteristic of the historical style of the day that Bullock recorded this eighty-six-word quotation as a single sentence instead of dividing it into several sentences.\textsuperscript{26}

Several of Joseph's clerks apostatized or died in office, which resulted in problems of continuity. Calling Willard Richards to work on the history brought a man with a sense of purpose and direction who had an indefatigable drive and dedication to completing Joseph's history. Shortly after Richards began his work on the history, twenty-seven-year-old Thomas Bullock would assist him significantly.

Thomas Bullock arrived in Nauvoo in the summer of 1843, bringing with him not only his professional training as a law and customs clerk, but also his spiritual preparedness to sit at the feet of the leading men of the kingdom. He seemed to thrive on accurate accounts and had a penchant for precision, which perhaps had been acquired as a law clerk and exciseman. Before emigrating to America, Bullock had risen to the position of supervisor in his profession.

Within five months of his arrival in Nauvoo, Bullock was clerking for Joseph and Willard. The clerks involved in compiling the history of Joseph Smith took a very active role in collecting materials and contributing to the written history. Herein lies perhaps Thomas Bullock's most significant contribution to Mormon historical writing. Though he served only nine months as a scribe to Joseph Smith, he was frequently with the Prophet, and his records are some of the most valuable written before the martyrdom. Later, when the history was continued after Joseph's death, Church Historian Willard Richards and his successor, George A. Smith, relied heavily on Bullock's memory and notes.

Bullock's 1845 journal entries mention collecting, copying, and filing items for the history, sometimes spending the entire day and week working solely on the history.\textsuperscript{27} On 15 March 1845 he wrote, "I have written fifty-six pages the last seven days—finished the year 1839." One week later he added, "I was writing history all day—finished 1840."\textsuperscript{28} Ten of Willard Richards's journal entries from 22 February to 30 April 1845 simply say "History."\textsuperscript{29} By 20 August 1845, the "manuscript history of the Church" was completed through 1842. Previous to Willard Richards's time as Church historian, a total of 157 manuscript pages had been written. By the time Bullock began clerking for Joseph, Richards had brought the total to 394 pages, and at the Prophet's death 655 pages.
By 4 February 1846, an additional 674 pages of the Church’s history had been written. Richards and Bullock wrote over eight times as much material as previous clerks in a little over half the time. Often they spent twelve or more hours a day in this writing marathon.

When the historian’s office papers and books were packed on 4 February 1846, previous to the exodus, Bullock not only assisted in the packing process but indexed and inventoried the materials that were leaving with Richards. In May 1848 as Brigham Young’s company left Winter Quarters for the Salt Lake Valley, Bullock drove the “Big Wagon” carrying the Church records. When the load proved to be too heavy, he helped cache some of the records that would later be brought by another company. As the records were unpacked in the Salt Lake Valley by Willard Richards, Bullock was again there to assist him. Bullock and Richards had so many responsibilities in the Salt Lake Valley that it was not until 1 December 1853 that Richards “wrote one line of History being sick at the time—and was never able to do any more.”

From 1854 to 1856, Church Historian George A. Smith, his chief clerk Bullock, and five other clerks compiled and wrote in the history. George A. Smith noted in a letter to Wilford Woodruff that he had “filled up all the reports of sermons by President Joseph Smith and others from minutes or sketches taken at the time in long hand by Dr. Richards, Wilford Woodruff, Thomas Bullock, William Clayton, Miss Eliza R. Snow &c.” Furthermore, he indicated, “there were mostly only two or three words (about half written) to a sentence.” From these accounts they produced “878 pages, averaging 700 words to a page, written in the large History Books.” Although the final years of the manuscript are in the handwriting of clerks Robert Campbell, Jonathan Grimshaw, and Leo Hawkins, George A. Smith made clear the vital role Bullock played in this compilation:

Thomas Bullock acted with me as chief clerk, being a clerk in the history office previous to, and at the time of Prest. Smith’s death, and has continued in it ever since. His pen wrote the principal part of the rough manuscript from my dictation, and his acquaintance with all the papers was of great assistance to me.

The authorship of Joseph’s history, later printed as The History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has come under fire from both Mormons and non-Mormons. Some argue that it is “defensive” history that only portrays the Mormon perspective. However, it should be remembered that this history was written immediately after the Missouri persecutions and that one of its functions was to “disabuse the public mind, and put all
inquirers after truth in possession of the facts, as they have transpired” because “evil-disposed and designing persons” had persecuted Church members, and authors had written “against its character as a Church” (JS—H 1:1).

Another problem developed when B. H. Roberts inserted the phrase “History of Joseph Smith, the Prophet: By Himself” as part of the title page of the History of the Church. As we have seen, the history was not written solely by Joseph Smith but rather was compiled according to historical methods commonly practiced in the early nineteenth century: that is, historical editors, such as Willard Richards, George A. Smith, and Wilford Woodruff assembled the “History of Joseph Smith.” Joseph Smith supervised the writing and compiling to some extent and explained his method to Howard Coray, a clerk employed to work on the history in 1840. Joseph was to provide all the resource material, and “our business, was not only to combine, and arrange in chronological order, but to spread out or amplify not a little, in as good historical style as may be.”

At the time of the Prophet’s death, the history had only been compiled to 5 August 1838. It was ten years after Joseph’s death before work on the history resumed. Therefore, the compilers were writing of events that had transpired up to sixteen years earlier. Modern researchers have ferreted out the sources of much of the material in the history, and little, other than the documents cited in the history, can be said to be from the Prophet Joseph himself. A more accurate, personal view of Joseph Smith unfolds in Dean C. Jesse’s The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith.

Another method of compilation used by the Prophet during the period just before the Martyrdom involved his dictating to Willard Richards what to write, and then allowing Richards to expand according to his literary skill and style. In Carthage Jail, just before his death, Joseph instructed Richards how to assemble the remaining history, and Richards and Bullock later worked on it according to his instructions. Following Richards’s death, George A. Smith and Bullock were invited to read the rough manuscript to Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and others of the Twelve, sometimes from early in the morning until late at night, seeking their suggestions, comments, and approval.

In these and other ways, the “History of Joseph Smith” was fashioned according to the style of the era. Yet its shapers desired that it do more than merely chronicle the life of the Prophet. Willard Richards and Wilford Woodruff were ever impatient that more was not being done on it. At Winter Quarters in 1846, Wilford Woodruff said that “he felt a great interest in this history, being a book of Books, and the one he should have to
be judged out of.” Orson Pratt persuaded his brethren of the Twelve “that a sufficient per centage be levied upon the property to support the historian for his services.” Bullock recalled Willard Richards having said, “A man must have his mind free, who writes a history that is to last for time and thoro’ all Eternity, and not bothered with other cares.” Wilford Woodruff further stated, “It is the duty of the H[igh] C[council] to let the Dr. have a box to put the papers in, to find wood, beef, and etc. . . . I rejoice that we have a ready writer. Let the Dr. go to work and save the Church History.”

The early shapers and compilers of the history shared with their contemporaries a view of historians as humanitarians rendering a tremendous service to mankind. However, unlike many of the noted historians of the day, the Mormon historical compilers were not independently wealthy and had more than the historical frontier to pioneer.

Thomas Bullock in some ways contributed as much as Willard Richards or George A. Smith to the “History of Joseph Smith.” Though he was not the immediate author of the manuscript, his journals and memory were extensively drawn on. He wrote the final or rough draft of the manuscript for each year from 1839 to 1844. His participation in the history spanned from nearly the beginning of the renewed emphasis on the work in 1843 until it was completed in 1856, something neither Richards or Smith could claim. In this clerking capacity it appears that Thomas Bullock not only fulfilled his duty, but in a way more significant than has hitherto been revealed.

Thomas Bullock’s contributions as a clerk were not limited to his work on the “History.” By January 1844, it had become apparent to Captain Dan Jones, half owner with Joseph Smith of the steamboat Maid of Iowa, that the clerk of the little steamer, a man named Derby, was gambling away funds. Shortly after this time, Thomas Bullock’s name was mentioned in connection with the steamship, and on 13 May 1844 Joseph instructed him “to take charge of the books of the Maid of Iowa and go on board as clerk.” The position of clerk on the Maid was important because most of the crew were members of the Church and portions of their salaries were deducted as tithing for the temple. With potential tithing funds being gambled away, Joseph’s intent may have been to get Bullock on board just long enough to straighten out the clerking problems. Many of the steamboats on the Mississippi were used for electioneering. Since Joseph was running for president of the United States, he might have wanted Bullock not only to clear up the financial records, but also to clerk for him in not only prophetic but also presidential pursuits.
Bullock’s clerking responsibilities during Joseph Smith’s presidential campaign of 1844 expanded to include being a copyist of the political pamphlets *Views on the Powers and Policy of the Government of the United States*, *The Voice of Innocence from Nauvoo*, and *Pacific Innuendo*.\(^1\) Bullock’s handwriting appears in some of the important last letters sent by Joseph to Governor Thomas Ford of Illinois, presidential candidate John C. Calhoun, and various Church leaders such as John Smith, Charles C. Rich, and Wilson Law.\(^2\)

In compliance with the eighty-fifth section of the Doctrine and Covenants regarding a clerk’s duty toward apostates, Bullock served as secretary for the court martial of Major General Wilson Law and detailed anti-Mormon activity in the Nauvoo area.\(^3\) He recorded Joseph’s final three sermons in Nauvoo, and eleven days before the Prophet’s death, Bullock was transferred into his personal office.

Bullock’s single most significant contribution while clerking for Joseph Smith was recording the King Follett Funeral Discourse delivered on Sunday, 7 April 1844, at the general conference of the Church held in Nauvoo. Disaffected Church members had hoped on this Sunday to proclaim Joseph a fallen prophet. In this swirl of negative sentiment, Joseph delivered one of his most glorious theological gems. Four of the most capable penmen in Nauvoo, Willard Richards, Wilford Woodruff, William Clayton, and Thomas Bullock, recorded the sermon. Of these, as Donald Q. Cannon has noted, Bullock’s “official conference minutes were by far the most nearly complete.”\(^4\) According to Howard Searle’s count, Bullock wrote 3,990 words, Clayton 2,596, Wilford Woodruff 2,486, Joseph Smith’s diary contains 1,443, the *Times and Seasons* account 4,760, and the *History of the Church* account 6,636.\(^5\)

The first published version of this talk, which appeared in the *Times and Seasons* in September 1844, was made by combining Bullock’s and Clayton’s notes only. In 1855 Jonathan Grimshaw, a clerk in the historian’s office, published a version of the discourse using elements from all four scribes. In a 1978 article, Stan Larson differed with Grimshaw’s method and used the following procedure to prepare a new amalgamation:

The account of Thomas Bullock was used as the basic running text. William Clayton’s version was then superimposed, adding a number of refinements such as extra clauses and clearer development of ideas. Afterwards, the parts recorded by Willard Richards were compared with what already had been developed; generally the Richards account merely confirmed various parts, though it added a number of new elements also. Finally the Wilford Woodruff account...
was considered, and its new material was added, with the understand-
ing that his material may not be as likely to represent the words
actually spoken by Joseph Smith, though the basic meaning would
likely be preserved.  

Larson indicated he chose the Bullock account because it was the
longest “and there are indications that it was written down at the
very time that Joseph Smith was speaking.” Thomas Bullock
usually sat at a desk near the stand when the brethren spoke. Of the
1844 general conference, Bullock said, “These were the greatest,
best, and most glorious five days that ever were.”

Bullock had studied a little of Pitman’s phonography but
never fully developed the skills and techniques employed by it. He
did however devise a modified version of shorthand that allowed
him to record, as Ronald K. Esplin has noted, “precise phrases”
when sermons were delivered. Without Bullock, a knowledge of
Joseph Smith’s final public discourses, particularly the King
Follett Discourse, could still be ascertained. However, with his
recorded accounts the understanding of Joseph’s declarations is
greatly expanded and deepened.

Another important dimension of Thomas Bullock’s historical
work is found in the journals and diaries he kept while he served
in clerking capacities for the Church or territory of Utah. As the
keeper of so many various diaries and journals, Bullock some-
times had difficulty keeping a separation of Church and state and
family. Hence his personal journals may read like a defense of the
Church; some of his Church entries are highly personal; and
his territorial papers occasionally combine public, Church, and
personal observations. This was not uncommon for the various
scribes who were engaged in clerking at many levels. Perhaps it
says something about Bullock as a man that he still kept personal
records while engaged in full-time writing for the Church and
territory.

It also tells us how corporate his approach was to the Mormon
community. Bullock was intimately involved with the inner circle
of ecclesiastical, city, and territorial leaders from 1843 to 1865. For
the sake of illustration we will examine his 1845-46 Nauvoo diary
and his 1846-48 plains journals.

As we have noted, Bullock and his family were not among the
main body of Saints departing from Nauvoo in February 1846
because he was left behind to record the fateful end of an era on the
Mississippi. While other skilled clerks were writing for Brigham
Young in the westward migration, Bullock labored in Nauvoo “for
more than seven months, without receiving one cent for pay.” By
July he had written to Bullock requesting him to join them
at Winter Quarters "as we frequently need more writers," but Bullock and his family were sick with ague and barely able to tend to their basic needs. He expressed frustration that he could not record more, yet his accounts of the last months in Nauvoo are unparalleled.

Bullock's 1845-46 Nauvoo diary gives a vivid picture of the desolation of the once noble city, the mob persecution, the attacks on the temple, and the loneliness of the Mormons who had been left behind. Since Bullock had been in the inner circle of leadership in Nauvoo, the mobbers came looking for him in September 1846. On one occasion he and other sick Saints were "carried into the tall weeds and woods, while all who could, hid themselves." With nightfall Bullock and his family returned to the shelter of George Wardle's home. The next morning about thirty men, "armed with guns and bayonets fixed, pistols in belt, the captain with a sword in his hand, and the stripes and stars flying about," approached Wardle's home. Bullock wrote that he "was raised from my bed, led out of doors, supported by my sister-in-law and the rail fence":

The captain then stepped out to within four feet of me, pointing his sword at my throat, while four others presented their guns with their bayonets within two feet of my breast, when the captain told me, "If you are not off from here in twenty minutes, my orders are to shoot you." I replied, "Shoot away, for you will only send me to heaven a few hours quicker, for you may see I am not for this world many hours longer." The captain then told me, "If you will renounce Mormonism you may stay here, and we will protect you." I replied, "This is not my house, yonder is my house (pointing to it) which I built and paid for, with the gold that I had earned in England. I never committed the least crime in Illinois, but I am a Mormon, and, if I live, shall follow the Twelve."

When Bullock finally left Nauvoo, he must have made a pathetic picture. As small as he was, his sickness had reduced him still further, and his head had been shorn as the recommended cure for ague. But the records he brought with him, by contrast, were meticulous and of incalculable value.

As a plains-crossing diarist, Thomas Bullock detailed the accounts of four major migrations from 1846 to 1848. The trained eye of an exciseman who possessed a keen wit illuminates the dark and dreary as well as the joyous and tender moments. In the 1847 vanguard journey to and from Salt Lake Valley and the 1848 company headed by Brigham Young, Bullock's handwriting appears on nearly every letter signed by Brigham Young and Willard Richards. Bullock kept the minutes of presiding priesthood inner-circle meetings and conscientiously took census of each of the camps. Many of the pioneer-trail letters left for following camps
were written by Bullock, and during July 1848 he was writing epistles in the name of the President of the Church and the Twelve Apostles.\textsuperscript{54}

Other leading diarists on the trek benefited from Bullock’s journal-keeping assignment. William Clayton wrote that he had “the privilege of copying from Brother Bullock’s journal.”\textsuperscript{55} Clayton in turn allowed Howard Egan to copy from his journal in trade for doing Clayton’s laundry.\textsuperscript{56}

Bullock’s camp journals consist of brief phrasing, usually condensed statements giving a sense of urgency to his work. He recognized the historic impact of the treks and wanted his journals to reflect his best efforts. Though what he wrote is insightful and comparable to the work of other leading diarists, his 1847 vanguard journal is not what it could have been, probably because he had been assigned to drive a team of oxen and tend to the cattle. All of the men in the company had specific responsibilities such as taking their turns at guard duty, but most of the men could perform their assigned duties during the day and have some time to themselves in the evenings. Bullock not only had to tend the cattle, but clerked for Brigham Young and Willard Richards, and kept the camp journal and minutes of all the meetings of the Twelve Apostles and the First Presidency. In this light, his two camp journals, each indexed in the back, seem to be a remarkable achievement.

One of the most evident characteristics of Bullock’s writing is his sense of humor. On one occasion, after a group of hunters returned with their bounty, Bullock boasted of his own hunting skill by stating that he had killed a mosquito. Another time he wrote of Porter Rockwell and three others who left camp searching for two horses stolen by a band of Pawnees. After finding the trail and traveling almost the entire distance the camp traveled that day, Rockwell got off his horse and leveled his pistol at what he thought was a wolf, “which brought up the resurrection of 15 Pawnee Indians.”\textsuperscript{57} When the company was returning to Winter Quarters in the fall of 1847, Bullock noted the cries of the wolves more than in the spring: “At night we have a Grand Solo, Quartet and Chorus from the Throats of a very musical band of Wolves.”\textsuperscript{58} His wit very naturally blends into the tapestry of history he wove.

Bullock’s diaries and journals show evidence of an honest man who wrote what he felt. He did not withhold material as one might do if he thought some future descendant would one day be reading the diary. Along with many of the pioneers, Bullock recognized the historic impact of their pioneering experience. In some of the official diaries he kept for the Church, he directed future scribes to other minutes by himself or others that would be
useful in the compilation of Church history. He specifically cited William Clayton as a key writer.\textsuperscript{59} In allowing Clayton to copy from his journals, Bullock was working in the tradition of nineteenth-century historical writers because "historians usually felt flattered rather than insulted when their words were used by another" to compile a better history.\textsuperscript{60}

Bullock’s polished penmanship was used by the Church and the territory of Utah when petitions, certificates, or official papers were needed. Much of the correspondence to Washington, D.C., during the Winter Quarters era and the early settlement of Salt Lake City are in his handwriting, including the 1849 petition for territorial status and the Constitution of the state of Deseret.\textsuperscript{51} Bullock’s participation in writing the Constitution of the state of Deseret further defines him as a man who fulfilled his “duty,” for as Peter Crawley has pointed out there apparently never was a constitutional convention.\textsuperscript{62} Nevertheless, detailed minutes in the handwriting of Thomas Bullock accompanied the Constitution to Washington, D.C. Bullock’s involvement in this episode should not mar or stain the rest of his written material, for he accurately wrote what he saw transpiring. In this case, the desire of the Saints “to be governed by their own”\textsuperscript{63} spawned hasty action, directed by the First Presidency, in which all of the leading men of Deseret directly or indirectly participated.

Thomas Bullock's written volumes for the Church, the city of Nauvoo, and the territory of Utah are unnumbered. His handwriting appears in the Nauvoo Legion minutes, the Nauvoo municipal court records, Nauvoo city council proceedings, Joseph Smith’s diary, letters, and sermons, \textit{Maid of Iowa} steamboat records, pamphlets, patriarchal blessings, general conference minutes, personal journals kept for the Church, temple proceedings, presidential pamphlets, maps, Church court records, and the manuscript history of the Church.\textsuperscript{64} In addition, he helped preserve and transport many valuable documents from the early history of the Church.

A valuable resource for further understanding Thomas Bullock’s historical contributions are the numerous letters he wrote to his first wife, Henrietta. He was very much in love with her and wrote lengthy letters.\textsuperscript{65} Most of what is known about his preparatory development as a clerk and religious-seeking man in England comes from these sources, and in addition these letters help to clarify several important historical issues. Bullock’s letters from Nauvoo to Willard Richards in Winter Quarters superbly blend his wit and witness. In his letters to the \textit{Millennial Star}, Bullock refutes the false allegations made by Judge Drummond. His 1857 letters as
a missionary in England relate the British reaction to Johnston’s Army:

The Newspaper Editors in London are either very ignorant of Geography west of the Mississippi, or they believe and publish lies rather than truth: for instance, the past fortnight. One day they publish Brigham Young arrested by Col. Sumner and on his way to Washington guarded by troops, in a day or two they publish he is gone on a secret tour to hide away from the rebellious Mormons, in a day or two after that we hear he is in Russian America establishing a new colony. Next he is at the head of the Utah troops within a 100 miles of Omaha City come to fight the U.S. Troops, in a day or two after we learn he is in Council with Col. Van Vleit in the Social Hall, threatening to burn every house in the Valley and go into the Mountains leaving all a desolate waste. and today I learn that a large company of Mormons dressed as Indians, have killed 500 U.S. Soldiers somewhere in Minnesota. such conflicting statements appear, and they are all believed to be true. no apology for the previous lies, no qualification for the rapid change of events, no telling how time and distance is annihilated or how he has the power to be in several places hundreds, yea thousands of miles apart at one time.66

After Bullock returned from his mission, he was gradually eased from the inner circle of power. He had a home in Summit County, and in 1862 Brigham Young began giving him assignments there. In 1865 he was called to work in the probate courts and as county clerk. Perhaps Bullock was too popular in the eyes of Governor Cummings, who was impressed with how well the records of the territory had been kept, and appointed Bullock as clerk of the territory. Maybe Brigham wanted to remove the old regime of clerks either because they were getting too old or too attached to the office.67

In any event, Bullock’s clerking days were not yet over. His final years in Summit County reveal an interesting development in his handwriting. His once minuscule and meticulous penmanship gave way to larger and somewhat less legible print, surely a sign of either eye trouble or a less sure hand due to his age. Nevertheless, he still rendered a fine service to the stake and the county. When the stake leaders considered whether he should be released as stake historian, they concluded that even in his advancing age no one else was as qualified to record the history of the stake. They knew, as few people today know, that Thomas Bullock was instrumental in forging and shaping the history of the Church.
NOTES

1. Thomas Bullock to Henrietta Rushton Bullock, 30 July 1857, Thomas Bullock Collection, Library-Archives, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives). This collection includes personal papers, letters, appointments, journals, documents, and microfilm copies of original documents on file in the LDS Church Archives.


3. James Turner letter of recommendation, Thomas Bullock Collection, LDS Church Archives.

4. Thomas Bullock to Henrietta Rushton Bullock, microfilm of letters for 1839, Thomas Bullock and Henrietta Rushton Bullock Collection, LDS Church Archives.

5. This term is used in a letter to the editor of the Salt Lake *Daily Herald*, 12 February 1885, on the occasion of Bullock’s death. Bullock mentioned in his journal of 27 June 1845 Heber C. Kimball’s calling him “little Tommy.” Howard Clair Searles, “Early Mormon Historiography: Writing the History of the Mormons, 1830-1858” (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Los Angeles, 1979), 96, gives Bullock’s weight as 116 pounds. The coat Bullock wore crossing the plains in 1847 is on display in the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers Museum in Salt Lake City. It appears that it would fit a slight man, approximately 5'2” to 5'6” in height, weighing about 110-40 pounds.

6. Thomas Bullock to Henrietta Rushton Bullock, 12 January 1856, Thomas Bullock Collection, LDS Church Archives.

7. C. Ward Despain, “*Thomas Bullock: Early Mormon Pioneer*” (Master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1956), 9. Before his baptism, Bullock was in the Anglican church and referred to himself as a High Churchman (see *Millenial Star* 14 [3 July 1852]: 299-300). For further information about his spiritual development see Thomas Bullock to Henrietta Rushton Bullock, Thomas Bullock and Henrietta Rushton Bullock Collections, LDS Church Archives.


12. Most of these appointments can be found in the Thomas Bullock Collection, LDS Church Archives. See also Despain, “Thomas Bullock,” 61-72, 91-98. Bullock also wrote poetry and particularly enjoyed reading novels. See his 1839 letters to Henrietta Bullock, Thomas Bullock Collection, LDS Church Archives.


18. Ibid., 15-16.

19. See Mal. 4:4-5 for the prophecy, and D&C 110:13-16 for the fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy. Also see Callcott, *History in the United States*, 19-53, for a thorough description of the early nineteenth-century historian. Callcott demonstrates that genealogical and historical societies did indeed grow after 1836. The first historical society in America was the Massachusetts Historical Society founded in 1791. By 1800 there were five such societies. In the 1830s there were forty-five societies. By the 1850s over 111 historical societies were established in the United States, and now the number of historical and genealogical societies is in the thousands.


21. Ibid., 123-38. The classic example of historical editors making up speeches is found in the works of George Washington compiled by Jared Sparks (see Whittaker, “Historians and the Mormon Experience,” 303).

22. Ibid., 134; see also 129-34.
Thomas Bullock


2Many of Thomas Bullock's sentences run from fifty to a hundred words. Sometimes he wrote nearly half a page before ending with a period.


Bullock, Journal, 22 March 1845, Thomas Bullock Collection, LDS Church Archives.

Willard Richards, Journal, 22 February-30 April 1845, LDS Church Archives. Richards's and Bullock's relationship was so intimate that when the law of adoption was revealed, Bullock and his family were sealed to Willard. For further information concerning the law of adoption, see Gordon Irving, "The Law of Adoption: One Phase of the Development of the Mormon Concept of Salvation, 1830-1900," BYU Studies 14 (Spring 1974): 291-314.

Jesse, "Joseph Smith's History," 468. By nineteenth-century standards, Bullock's spelling, vocabulary, and penmanship were superb. If he had a fault in his writing, it was in the punctuation and capitalization of hastily penned items. Finished copies, certificates, or final drafts of reworked shorthand notes were elegant.

Bullock, Journal, 16 December 1846, Thomas Bullock Collection, LDS Church Archives.

Richards, Journal, 17 December 1846, Willard Richards Collection, LDS Church Archives.

Bullock's contribution to the "Manuscript History" of the Church spans almost the last three hundred pages of volume 3 and most of volumes 4 through 7 in the currently published seven-volume set. Of the first 2,407 manuscript pages, Bullock wrote 2,013. George A. Smith did labor for approximately seventy days in Nauvoo with Willard Richards, so he was somewhat acquainted with Richards's system for writing the history.


Bullock, Journal (16 September 1854-9 December 1861), LDS Church Archives. Smith described the process of compilation in the following terms: "the greatest care has been taken to convey the ideas in the prophet's style as near as possible; and in no case has the sentiment been varied that I know of; as I heard the most of his discourses myself, was on the most intimate terms with him, have retained a most vivid recollection of his teachings, and was well acquainted with his principles and motives. . . . The plan of compiling the history of Joseph Smith from the Journals kept by his clerks, Willard Richards, William Clayton, Wilford Woodruff, and Thomas Bullock, was commenced by himself, extracting items of necessary information in regard to general and particular movements from the Times and Seasons, Millennial Star, Wasp, Neighbor, and other publications, extracts from city councils, Municipal courts, and Mayor's dockets and Legion Records, which were all kept under his direction; also the movements of the Church as found in Conference Minutes and High Council records, and the records of the several quorums. Together with letters and copies preserved and compiled them under date of transaction, according to the above plan which he while in prison just previous to his murder requested Elder Willard Richards to continue. . . . A large amount of testimony has also been written from the verbal statements of individuals, which was afterwards embodied in the manuscript of the History; also affidavits taken for the same purpose."

Bullock, Journal (17 December 1846), Thomas Bullock Collection, LDS Church Archives.

Richards, Journal (17 December 1846), Willard Richards Collection, LDS Church Archives.

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Joseph Smith Presidential Pamphlets, 1844 papers, particularly 7 February 1844, reel 4 of F312, Joseph Smith Collection, LDS Church Archives.


Bullock, Journal (7 April 1844), Thomas Bullock Collection, LDS Church Archives.
"Ronald E. Esplin, in a personal conversation with the author in March 1987, made these comments when comparing the notes of Bullock as secretary of the Twelve from 1846-56, and the printed works of George D. Watt in the Journal of Discourses. Esplin said the flavor and color of the speakers were found in Bullock’s records. He called Watt’s wording “polished phrases” and Bullock’s “precise phrases.” George D. Watt was also a British convert who introduced phonography to the Church. He was president of the Phonographic Society of Nauvoo and also an adopted son of Willard Richards. For more information on Watt and phonography, see Ronald G. Watt, “Sailing ‘The Old Ship Zion’: The Life of George D. Watt,” BYU Studies 18 (Fall 1977): 48-65.

Bullock, Journal, 25 September 1846, Thomas Bullock Collection, LDS Church Archives.

Journal History, 7 July 1846, 6.


Bullock, Journal, 16 July 1848, Thomas Bullock Collection, LDS Church Archives.

William Clayton, William Clayton’s Journal (Salt Lake City: Clayton Family Association, 1921), 114.

Ibid., 176, 343 (23 May and 10 August 1847). It is evident in the Journal History that the history for the 1846-48 treks was compiled after 1915, when Egan’s journal was printed, before 1921, when Clayton’s was typeset. Egan was quoted every day. Clayton hardly ever, and Bullock’s official records were used to some extent. It appears that Egan copied from Clayton for the duration of the vanguard trek.

Bullock, Journal, 27 April 1847, Thomas Bullock Collection, LDS Church Archives.

Ibid., 5, 9 October 1847.

Ibid., 23 April 1847.

Caldcott, History in the United States, 136.

Bullock, Journal, 1 May 1849, Thomas Bullock Collection, LDS Church Archives.


Ibid., 20; see also 9, 19.

Thomas Bullock’s handwritten materials are found not only in collections pertaining to his various clerical assignments, but also in the following personal collections in the LDS Church Archives: Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Willard Richards, Thomas Bullock, and Henrietta Rushton Bullock.

See the letters in the Henrietta Rushton Bullock Collection, LDS Church Archives. Bullock wrote so small a hand that often a single page of his handwritten material requires one or two single-space typewritten pages. Often in his letters he would squeeze notes above his salutation or add lengthy postscripts when he had room left on the paper.

Thomas Bullock to Henrietta Rushton Bullock, 25 November 1857, Thomas Bullock Collection, LDS Church Archives. Most of Bullock’s letters to Henrietta during 1857-58 can be found in the Henrietta Rushton Bullock Collection.

Searle claims that Bullock was released in 1865 because of illness (see Searle, “Early Mormon Historiography,” 101). Wilford Woodruff suggested that Bullock was released because Joseph Young complained to his father, Brigham Young, that Bullock was getting too possessive of the materials in the historian’s office, and Brigham thought Bullock would take items from the office that were not his. Woodruff felt Bullock was a man of integrity (see Wilford Woodruff, Journal, 26 March 1862, 22 January 1865, Wilford Woodruff Collection, LDS Church Archives).
Book Reviews


Reviewed by William B. Allen, professor of government at Harvey Mudd College, Claremont, California, and member, United States Commission on Civil Rights.

In Search of the Republic provides evidence of a remarkable change in American scholarship on the founding of the United States. This study by Richard Vetterli and Gary Bryner is all the more valuable in proportion as the change they record has heretofore passed unperceived. Where once scholarship debated the question whether the United States were founded purely on material considerations and a view of human nature as evil or, alternatively, on moral considerations and possibly some particular providence, today the debate is radically altered. That is why this book is able to announce its purposes as to “consider the evolution of the idea of public virtue,” “to discuss its central role in the political thought of the founding,” and “to describe its relationship with the other political and cultural elements of the American republic” (2). The question now is whether virtue (or morality) constituted a foundation of the United States Constitution, or whether virtue is the goal of that enabling instrument. Superseding all former quarrels, this new debate installs virtue on each side of the equation. Thus the old battle is terminated, though it remains obscure how that came to pass.

Vetterli and Bryner seem to me correctly to have grasped the metamorphosis taking place—as is reflected in the title of Lance Banning’s essay “Second Thoughts on Virtue. . . .” (1) Nevertheless, no less recent a production than Allan Bloom’s The Closing of the American Mind maintains with considerable persuasiveness the thesis that the founding was radically flawed, Hobbesian, and altogether hostile to the claims of virtue and nobility. This study, on the other hand, situates the founding so squarely in two millennia of concern for virtue that it creates the impression that The Closing of the American Mind sprang purely from the brow of Allan Bloom without any foundation in the American past.
Every reader of Bloom’s book, however, discovers the familiar face of our own time in his account of the relativity of values (and indeed there are no moral values that are not relative!) and an evident decline of moral consensus within the society. Thus, the portrait of moral continuity that Vetterli and Bryner draw serves to set off in stark relief the portrait of moral decline depicted by Bloom. Sometime after 1832 (the period in which Tocqueville visited the United States and up to which Vetterli and Bryner survey) and up to our own time, a dramatic break has occurred—a break of epoch-making significance.

This picture is somewhat ironic. For the accomplishment of a view of the founding in which virtue is no longer problematic resulted partly from a decision to see the Revolution as no decisive break with the past. To the degree, then, that the American Revolution expressed moral continuity with the past rather than a radical departure, it becomes more urgent to discover where America did in fact depart in later years.

I believe, however, that this excellent book errs in downplaying the revolutionary significance of the founding in precisely the opposite manner to that in which Bloom erred in depreciating the moral accomplishment of the Revolution. Of the two errors, Vetterli’s and Bryner’s is far the more acceptable. For they seem to wish to resist the imputation of man standing alone, cut loose from his moral moorings in the Judeo-Christian heritage. Their insightful discussion of private morality as the foundation of the republic—echoing Washington’s first inaugural address—therefore integrates private morality with a moral tradition instead of leaving it to be colonized by value relativism. I submit, however, that the idea of a historical break—indeed, even new revelation—need no more leave man standing alone than did the flight from Egypt leave Israel standing alone. Particular providence generally distinguishes itself by thwarting human plans.

The eight chapters of *In Search of the Republic* chronicle the “conversation about virtue” from the perspective of what American colonialists and founders were likely to have heard and said. In addition to generous reliance on primary testimony, the study demonstrates an admirable command of secondary literature. The account is compelling, as far as it goes, and prepares the way for the next step. That is, from a virtue conceived as subordination to community (chapter 1) to the ultimate identification of virtue with “self-interest rightly understood,” the authors carefully maintain their focus on the relationship of virtue to the idea of republicanism.

Vetterli and Bryner are far from the first to have imagined ancient virtue and republicanism to be founded on generous
expectations of human nature, while modern virtue and republicanism purportedly profit from the ultimate recognition of man's fallen nature. The facts are actually the reverse, however. The ancients believed few indeed were capable of true virtue (and thus salvation, later). The great modern breakthrough was the affirmation that the many were capable of virtue—that is, self-government. This is nowhere so evident as in number 51 of *The Federalist*, where Publius argues the need to supply the "defect of better motives" in representatives—but not in the people—with "auxiliary precautions." Such a conception would have been incomprehensible in the ancient world. And today folk often misread this language as applying to the people, because that still seems intuitive (compare page 187 with 194, where this passage is discussed from both of these perspectives).

The contrivances of American constitutionalism need to be comprehended as aids to facilitate the people's rule rather than merely as checks upon their vices. *In Search of the Republic* helps us to see this truth with clarity. In the last analysis, we discover the need to take virtue seriously at the founding only when we have finally conceded the people's copious authority for social and political institutions.

For that reason the discussion of virtue is the natural pair to the discussion of equality. Virtue is important at the founding because equality is the central principle of the founding. There is no foundation for republicanism apart from the consent of the governed, no consent apart from equality, and no equality apart from transcending moral law. The equation is straightforward and simple. *In Search of the Republic* succeeds in the best way a book can: it not only leads the reader to the center of the conversation about its subject, virtue; it also readies the reader for a new search.

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**NOTE**


This well-designed book with cover art by Royden Card will be warmly welcomed by Douglas Thayer’s many readers. The stories are vintage Thayer, well-honed, not recognizably Mormon, but definitively Western. The five stories present themes familiar to Thayer’s readers: young men in search of themselves, testing their wits and their courage against a challenging landscape. Sometimes in a cowboy-Indian tradition, they test their manhood, but unlike the old heroes they are not always victorious, and they are not “macho.” They doubt themselves, they are intrinsically gentle, and somewhere they have mothers who worry.

The title story speaks in the voice of a young man working at Yellowstone Lake as a summer ranger. He is befriended by an elderly couple who have been summer campers for more than forty years. Mrs. Wahlquist feeds him and shares worries about her husband. Since his retirement from Sears, Mr. Wahlquist has developed kidney ailments and a melancholy turn of mind. “My husband was born at least a hundred years too late,” she says, and the young narrator understands. Their trailer is a “small museum” full of books, maps, Indian artifacts, and photographs of famous Indian chiefs. Wahlquist “had spent forty years visiting the places he’d read about in the accounts left by the trappers, mountain men, explorers, and Indians. He liked to stand at the place and read from what had been written” (82).

“‘The wilderness is gone now,’ Mr. Wahlquist said. ‘You can still find little pieces of it, but it’s mostly gone. . . . It’s a land of spirits. That’s all. All you can do is think about what it was like’” (83). When the unnamed narrator joins in the search for the missing man, the outcome is foregone, but the grief is real. Grief, not only for a life, but for the great disappearing spaces of the West.

The other four stories are also strong and moving. “The Red-Tailed Hawk,” first published in Dialogue, is a classic. Its careful attention to detail, an almost detached dryness, renders this coming-of-age story fit competition for Hemingway. In fact, I like Thayer better than Hemingway. He wears better. Thayer not only grows on the reader, but he is obviously a growing writer. He has grown in his ability to depict characters other than young men.
coming of age. He has developed the sensitivity to create women and children of different ages and stages. He has Hemingway’s unflinching eye but with a deeper moral vision. His Mormonism influences him but without the sentimentality that sometimes mars the work of Mormon writers.

“The Gold Mine” is told entirely through the eyes of Mrs. Miller, a woman of uncertain age who has been attending the sick, the wounded, and the dead at the bottom of a canyon with an abandoned gold mine somewhere in the desert (Nevada?). To her, the quick and the dead have equal validity. She speaks about the processes of laying out a body with the same matter-of-factness she applies to baking a cake or tending her flowers. The reader knows women like her, women who have survived three husbands and severe attacks of diabetes, and who seemingly will go on until the Millennium. However, her energetic sanity covers a creeping decay, an unnamed dread.

We do not really know who Carl is—the young man who lives alone in a shack near the abandoned mine shaft. But we sense that he has been abandoned too. We meet him when he comes down the canyon to report the death of the boy, Richard, whose body is in the shaft. Richard has been living with Carl. Richard’s father had brought Richard from Provo, Utah, in an attempt to reform him. He had explained to Mrs. Miller that he “wanted him to run loose. . . . He just wanted Richard to ride that dirt bike of his across this desert till he got some of the hell out of his system. He’d decided he couldn’t keep Richard from breaking his neck if that’s what he wanted to do.” The father had owned stock in the worthless mine, so “he figured he would get something out of it” (25). We hear the scream of Richard’s mother when Carl calls to break the news. We listen to Mrs. Miller’s litany of regret as she dresses the body and speculates on the mother’s grief for another abandoned son.

The terrifying feelings of the almost silent Carl somehow break through the quiet economy of the writing. The merciless qualities of the lonely desert are contrasted with the social cooperation of its ranchers, its lawmen, its nurturing women. Carl must build a box for the body, help Mrs. Miller dress it, and load it into the back of his pickup on a bed of ice for the long ride to Utah. Mrs. Miller shows him how, feeds him, lectures him, and rides with him. The characters take shape through deft depiction of the telling detail, and small gestures assume symbolic power. An unforgettable story!

All the stories in this collection are unforgettable. I recommend them unequivocally.

Reviewed by S. George Ellsworth, professor emeritus of history, Utah State University.

This declaration of faith by one of Brigham Young University’s distinguished professors and Mormon historians, comes out of a lifetime of studying, writing, and teaching Mormon history, and as such deserves serious attention from a wide readership. A personal testimony on matters of faith, it also evokes the richness of Richard D. Poll’s experience in teaching students and dealing with their problems. Many will find the book both mentally invigorating and religiously rewarding.

These are “not technical, scholarly pieces,” the author tells us, but rather “interpretative and reflective productions of a lifetime. . . . The moral values they emphasize are tolerance, consistency, and commitment.” All are derived from public addresses. The first was given as a sacrament meeting talk in the Palo Alto Ward, August 1967. The others “were given in secular settings to predominantly Mormon audiences.” Drawing from his years of teaching experience, Poll discusses “the implications and problems of studying and writing Mormon history” (vii–ix).

The first chapter is Poll’s widely read talk on the iron rod and the Liahona. Taking his figures from Father Lehi, he distinguishes among “good Latter-day Saints” persons of two different persuasions as to how they approach faith and reason and are guided in the gospel to the tree of life or life’s destination: Iron Rods and Liahonas. By holding fast to the rod of iron, one can follow along and reach the tree of life (1 Ne. 8:19–30). Liahona Latter-day Saints take their cue from the brass ball compass provided Father Lehi, whose pointers “did work according to the faith and diligence and heed which we did give unto them.” Writing appeared “which did give us understanding concerning the ways of the Lord,” the words changing from time to time “according to the faith and diligence which we gave unto it” (1 Ne.16:10, 26–29). From these figures, Poll has constructed an intriguing framework for characterizing patterns of thought and action of some Latter-day Saints today.

The Iron Rod-Liahona paradigm was no doubt designed for limited applications and is somewhat abstract from scriptural meanings; hence reception of the model has been and will continue to be mixed. While the model may be useful sometimes, when taken
seriously or pushed to limits it tends to create stereotypes and divisions where none need exist. Taken separately, the figures tend to polarize. Abstractions are turned into personality traits. The original talk gave little or no room for the possibility of a person following both the rod and the Liahona. It was one or the other. “Revisited” allowed that a person might move from one to the other (20). Since this reviewer sees more similarities than differences, he would prefer an equation of the iron rod and the Liahona, not alone the iron rod or the Liahona. Each points the direction that one must follow to get to eternal life. Since the iron rod is the word of God, one presumably either hears or reads or receives it by direct inspiration; hence mental processes are involved as in the case of receiving instructions and directions from the Liahona. Following the iron rod through mists of darkness may require as much faith and diligence as operating a Liahona. One loses out if he ignores either. They both say, “Live the word of the Lord.” Neither is subject to the manipulation of an individual. We are all Iron Rods and Liahonas, in differing degrees in differing situations or periods of our lives. It is the use of both in harmony that leads to the tree of eternal life.

In the remaining eight chapters, Poll illustrates the historian’s method and approach and the values received from the study of history, among them the liberal education received by those who read a lot of history, compare writers, study sources, endeavor to write, and teach students. In a kindly but emphatic spirit of gentle revisionism and reform, he would set the record straight and adjust somewhat our understandings about Mormonism and Mormon history.

The practicing historian, teaching college students the history of Utah and the Church, meets in his students the greatest variety of beliefs and understandings on major and minor points. The professor is bound to tell it as nearly “as it actually happened” as he can, based on an honest study of the contemporary documents. The reaction of students to that presentation depends on the students’ attitudes of mind, parental teachings, seminary and Sunday School teachers, and peers. For a people who gain most of their Church history from the pulpit, Sunday School, or seminary, the contrast of approaches and information can be threatening. The primary purpose of the pulpit is to sustain faith; that of the college classroom is the discovery and dissemination of truth. Some church speakers and teachers take poetic license and enjoy exaggeration, and sometimes even out-prophet the prophet.

Idealized versions of events that have happened, Poll defines as historical myth. His plea is for historical honesty and
correctness, although the process of desanitizing the myth account can be traumatic. He writes:

If people grow up believing that the heroes and heroines of their past were a different kind of people, without the human traits and vulnerabilities which we have, they have been ill served by their "history." The greater the disparity between myth and event, the greater the potential trauma in confronting the past "as it actually happened." And the more natural the tendency to respond irrationally. (70)

And again: "I do believe in giving milk before meat, but I do not think children should be taught anything, the unlearning of which will be traumatic. If we create in them the impression that the Church does not change, or that only trivial things change, we create a risk, because some changes are substantial" (86).

The author's discussion of the role of God and man in history is a promising beginning for a definitive essay on a Mormon philosophy of history. The lack of a Mormon philosophy of history seems not to worry or concern anyone, and that might be just as well, but the question of the role of God and man in Mormon history should be high on everyone's list of topics to think through. In what ways is God intervening in history? Does man's free agency work against God's foreknowledge? Does God's foreknowledge truly allow for man's agency? Does God know the end from the beginning? Is there freedom for man to take an effective role? Poll concludes, "the history of humanity is not already written, not even for the Lord himself... God is the producer and Jesus Christ is the central actor in the play, but what happens on the stage depends significantly upon the choices of all members of the cast" (37). When a Mormon philosophy of history is written, it must answer for all peoples in all times and places. It must go beyond our Judeo-Christian tradition centered on the Western world. We must not exclude the East as one of my students once tried to do by declaring "they are not God's people."

While each talk stands alone, there is a unity throughout—the same speaker deeply concerned over important issues involving Church doctrine and history. Later chapters contain recurring reference to the subject of change in the Church, the inerrancy (or not) of scripture, the infallibility (or not) of prophets, and the problem of revelation and translation. In "Confronting the Skeletons," Poll demonstrates how well he can tell a story and analyze a problem as he essays skillfully on the Mountain Meadows Massacre, or Mormon polygamy, or tells of his visit, with his wife, with President David O. McKay and then President Joseph Fielding Smith the same day on the same subject. These and some other sections brighten the entire work into a readable whole.
One is impressed with the revelations of Richard D. Poll’s own thought, and one wonders at his perceptions of the beliefs and understandings of his audiences, to warrant the contents and thrust of these talks. This rich little book will be a gold mine for future historians of popular Mormon thought during the late twentieth century.


Reviewed by Kenneth W. Godfrey, Utah North Area Director for the LDS Church Educational System.

In writing the biography of Samuel Claridge, S. George Ellsworth fulfilled a lifelong dream. As a teenaged boy living in Kansas City, he spent winter evenings taking dictation from his mother as she, with difficulty, read from yellowed, worn pages the autobiography that Samuel Claridge, Ellsworth’s grandfather, had left behind. It was this activity that aroused Ellsworth’s historical instincts and played a major role in his studying history at some of the nation’s best universities. Throughout a career that included writing his history of Utah that is used in the state’s public schools, editing the *Journal of Western History*, and writing articles for the *Utah Historical Quarterly*, Ellsworth still kept the spark of his dream aglow. After retiring from his long professorship at Utah State University, he began composing this literary labor of love, which was published in 1987.

A thorough perusal of the sources Ellsworth used in writing this book discloses the exhaustive nature of the research, the same kind of thoroughness that has characterized his scholarship now for almost five decades. In addition to Claridge’s unpublished autobiographical sketches, he must have read every diary of every person whose path crossed or paralleled that of Samuel Claridge in any way. The source documents range from published books (some of which are very old), to journal articles, monographs, and letters, as well as diaries, journals, and the scriptures. Just reading through the thirty-five single-spaced pages titled “Sources and Notes” is like taking a course in pioneer history. Ellsworth has even measured the size of the paper on which his sources wrote and describes what the manuscripts look like. He has also gleaned encyclopedic knowledge of the English towns, cathedrals, rivers, and streets that were
part of his grandfather’s early life. He gives intimate insights into Claridge’s missionary labors during this period. Indeed, Ellsworth’s research and storytelling abilities enable the reader almost to walk in Claridge’s shoes.

Perhaps the book’s greatest contributions are the insights it provides into the struggles of the Latter-day Saints in settling “the Muddy,” and Brigham Young’s admission after a firsthand inspection of this mission that he had been deceived by the reports of his advisors. His honesty in confessing that a mistake had been made, and his rescinding the colonization call, allowing those who wished to pull out, is a refreshing, not too often told episode of Mormon history. That Claridge’s faith in Brigham Young did not falter as he heard the prophet’s bold admission that he had erred is also sensitively narrated.

Another major contribution is the account of the working of the united order at the place and time it reached its zenith. Its successes as well as its failures are clearly delineated. Chronicled, too, are the advantages and disadvantages of this experiment in communal life. Ellsworth develops with delicacy and care the thesis that the lack of free agency was a major concern of those who resided in Orderville and became the major factor, together with concern for the lack of economic opportunity for the young people, for the order’s collapse. The peace and security Claridge experienced while serving his British mission, knowing that his large family was being well taken care of by the united order, is also faithfully told. Ellsworth also tactfully documents the fact that President John Taylor did not have the same enthusiasm and religious commitment for communal living as did Brigham Young. In fact, when “Brother Brigham” died, for all intents and purposes, the united order perished with him.

The reader of this book has reason to be glad that Orderville collapsed, or at least was seriously weakened with the death of the second Church president, because Samuel Claridge withdrew from it and once more became a pioneer—this time in Thatcher, Arizona. In keeping with his habit of painstaking documentation, Ellsworth has carefully researched the trail the Claridges traveled to reach their Arizona home. He seems to know every rock, every precipice, every watering hole, and every obstacle they might have encountered along the way. The reader is also able to visualize Claridge starting over at age fifty-five, acquiring land, constructing a new home, and finally achieving, after years of struggle, a certain economic security as he grows older. Perhaps the things he eventually acquired would not have been quite so impressive had he not had some financial help from his millionaire son-in-law, William.
McCune. Still the reader comes to believe that Claridge by force of will and faith would have somehow succeeded even without that aid.

Ellsworth chronicles the life and times of Claridge as a pioneer bishop in Thatcher without omitting any of the difficulties, challenges, and annoyances. Not forgotten either are the spiritual highs, the acts of service, and the whole-souled involvement with the people who made up his congregation. Ellsworth’s Samuel Claridge is a man whose life was dominated by conviction, love, service, and self-sacrifice—a man who seems to have lived free of jealousy, hate, anger, and with no lust for power or position. His days were spent “transforming virgin desert lands into productive farms, building comfortable homes in ordered villages, and becoming a true Latter-day Saint.” In many ways, he represents the ideal Mormon.

Good as this book is, it does have a few weaknesses. There are places where Ellsworth repeats exact quotations from Claridge’s writings more than once, for example, on page ninety-nine and again on 101: “I bought me some good land and a lot for a vineyard and made every calculation of making it my permanent home.” The author could have profited by having a good editor carefully read the manuscript before the book was published.

This reviewer would have preferred fewer long quotations and more of Ellsworth in the text. Furthermore, the two pages on which the author lists the entire inventory of property Claridge turned over to the united order I found rather dull and unimportant. I would have opted for placing such material in the endnotes. There are also a few cases where the author tantalizes the reader and then fails to produce. For instance on page 237 we read, “Bishop Claridge’s relations with Christopher Layton, Stake President, must have been generally cordial and supportive, though evidence suggests some tension.” I was ready for some examples of personality conflicts, theological disagreements, or arguments over a decision of a bishop’s court. Yet the only instance that is cited is a brief dispute over the Claridge children taking some trees from Layton land, and this was amicably settled. In the dozen years the two men served together in their important ecclesiastical assignments, no other “tension” seems to have occurred, which seems remarkable and could have been stressed even more.

In spite of a few flaws, this is a fine biography that represents one of the newer emphases in the writing of Mormon history: dealing with the lives of the common folk. I am confident that historians will yet write about other Mormons whose names threaten to become blown dust on the desert of the centuries. I hope
that some biographies are even written about those who did not become bishops and patriarchs, as did Claridge, but rather lived out their lives faithfully following the decision makers. We need, I believe, more of their histories, too.

On the first pages of his book, Ellsworth writes that Mormonism is both a look backward and a look forward. It looks back to the primitive Church and believes the latter-day organization is a restoration of that movement first formulated by the Master in the meridian of time. It looks forward to the second coming of Christ, and teaches that the Church's mission is to prepare the world for that event. In looking back at the life and times of Samuel Claridge, this book shows us what the Church was like, how it operated, and what its goals were in pioneer times. S. George Ellsworth has painted for us, with no small amount of love, a clear picture of a man, his wives, and his posterity that motivates us to look forward to a future day when we might meet Samuel Claridge. Until then, we can be sure wherever he is that Claridge is living with humor, penning some poetry, talking with friends and family, and displaying faithfulness and dedication.


Reviewed by Mark Grandstaff, a doctoral candidate in American history at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and a historian with the Office of Air Force History in Washington, D.C.

A current popular movie portrays a scholarly team comprised of a father (a medievalist) and his son (an archaeologist) on a last crusade in quest of the holy grail. This interdisciplinary duo, after a series of epic adventures and a number of life-threatening gyrations, comes within inches of obtaining the mythical cup. Failing in their materialistic quest, the father assures the son that they have received something far greater than the grail itself. They found what every scholar hopes to find—"illumination."
Similarly, many fine scholars have made the illusive quest in search of early Mormon ideological and social origins. The books and articles in print are legion. The names of the various authors read like a Who’s Who of both American and Mormon history: Alexander, Allen, Arrington, Brodie, Bushman, Cross, Davis, De Voto, De Pillis, Edwards, O’Dea, Quinn, Shipps, and Wood, to cite but a few. Whether in advancing a new thesis or in challenging and revising old ones, each has greatly enriched our understanding of the Mormon movement. This quest is furthered by Marvin Hill’s *Quest for Refuge* and Kenneth Winn’s *Exiles in a Land of Liberty*, as they attempt to shed new light on an already impressive body of literature.

There is no doubt that Hill’s work is a significant contribution. Largely an update of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago in the late 1960s, it is a serious attempt to place Mormonism within the context of its times. Schooled under Daniel Boorstin, Sidney Mead, and Martin Marty, and reacting often to Becker, Beard, Schlesinger, and Hofstader, Hill incorporates within his analysis of Mormonism important elements of both the progressive and consensus traditions: class and political conflict, relativism, and status-anxiety.

*Quest for Refuge* is a masterful synthesis of primary research and perceptive analysis. Not only does the work expand upon Hill’s previous research, it also advances a number of provocative interpretations. As he develops his major theme, anti-pluralism, a different panorama of early Mormonism develops, albeit for some a controversial one. While primarily focusing on the movement’s ideological development, Hill deftly describes the emergence of the early Church’s profound aversion toward American pluralism. In fact, it is this dialectical clash—between the way America was supposed to be and the way it was developing—that was responsible for the internal and external persecution the Mormons received. While not the only group to fear the divisiveness of pluralism, the Mormons perhaps reacted most strongly to it. They viewed competition among religious and secular institutions as evidence of an underlying social turmoil that stemmed from social disintegration (that is, the breakdown of family, church, and community caused by westward expansion) and felt that pluralism would eventually ruin America.

If *Quest for Refuge* is a tribute to the progressive and consensus traditions, Kenneth Winn’s *Exiles in a Land of Liberty*, also a doctoral dissertation, represents the “republican” school of American historiography. Pioneered by historians such as J. G. A. Pocock, Bernard Bailyn, and Gordon Wood, this interpretation
focuses on an eighteenth-century "country party" ideology of the ultimate form of society as a "republic" composed of a virtuous citizenry willing to sacrifice their wants and desires for the common good. Property ownership was the key to making dispassionate decisions about the needs of the community. Luxury was viewed as antithetical to good government and could only promote tyranny or anarchy. Virtuous citizens were thus expected to choose good leaders, and ensure, by force if need be, that the voices of liberty and freedom were not subverted by a selfish (tyrannical) minority.

Winn, unlike Hill, finds Mormon antipluralism just a part of a much larger ideological problem. The Mormon republican vision, which Winn calls "communal republicanism," was out of step with its time. It looked backward to a preindustrial setting, while the emerging republican paradigm of the 1820s and 1830s had become more individualistic and pluralist. For Winn this competing set of republican definitions, and for Hill the Mormons' reaction to sectarian strife and pluralism, set the stage for conflict that followed the Saints wherever they settled.

The Mormon movement for these authors is a primitivist craving to stave off the changing social order of Jacksonian America by replacing it with the Mormons' own order. Both Hill and Winn find the Book of Mormon an important source of the movement's ideological consistency. Hill persuasively argues that the Book of Mormon is the story of a society caught in the throes of social upheaval caused by problems similar to those facing Jacksonian America. Religious disillusionment, materialism, political and societal corruption, poverty, and violence were major problems found within the Nephite culture that eventually led to their destruction. The major theme of the Book of Mormon, according to Hill, is that a society must not only believe in the true gospel to survive, but that "godly" men must rule (xiii). Thus, the contention and strife caused by competing factions inherent in the emerging American social order could be reduced only if unity would prevail. As Hill sees it, the "quest for refuge" was the search by a group of the socially disaffected for that unity.

In contrast, Winn's interpretation portrays the Book of Mormon as a republican document demonstrating that God approves of a nation of yeoman farmers who strive to remain virtuous and free of corruption. Men like Nephi, Abinadi, and Moroni were classical republicans who put the needs of others above their own. Nephite society prospered when faithful to republican principles. It became corrupt and decadent when luxury, class formation, and Masonic-like movements permeated the cultural
fabric. Antebellum America was equally in trouble as libertarianism, pluralism, and capitalism took their toll on virtue. For Winn, Joseph Smith was a radical who from the very beginning sought to reform society with his view of "communal republicanism." The Prophet and his people sought a return to their Puritan and Revolutionary traditions in order to subvert the increasingly individualistic and corrupt society by fostering a religious community that would reestablish civic virtue and other republican tenets.

Hill's interpretation of Joseph Smith is much different. Joseph was no radical. Rather he sought consensus in society by creating a movement void of the generalities and conflicts that plagued Jacksonian America. His doctrines often were reactions or responses to the major issues causing contention. The doctrines of the plurality of Gods and multiple heavens, for instance, were attempts to resolve the divisive bickering between trinitarians and universalists.

What is more satisfactory about Hill's interpretation is his grasp of the primary sources and his rich understanding of Joseph Smith's early years. While Winn relies on traditional sociodeterministic accounts of the events leading to the First Vision, Hill offers an important revision. In his view, Joseph, a product of a puritan background, a religiously anxious and status-seeking mother, and a discontented, alcoholic, and unbelieving father, found himself unable to participate in an evangelical conversion experience. He was an ambivalent "victim of the revivals." Rejecting, to a certain extent, the 1838 vision account, Hill finds no revival in Palmyra in 1820 that would precipitate Joseph's teenage conversion. Rather it was after his brother Alvin's death in 1823 that his mother actively campaigned to convert her family to religion. His mother's constant importuning and his father's continued ambivalence no doubt stirred within Joseph "deep and poignant" feelings at this time, though he remained unconverted.

Most important is Hill's assertion that it was not until 1827 that Joseph Smith became a religious seeker. While accounts of his first vision (especially the 1838 version) do acknowledge Joseph's reaction to the competition and sectarian strife that caused him great anxiety, Hill adds a number of compelling forces that guided him into a quest for the primitive gospel. It was not only his maturing religious disposition, but a desire to escape the competing denominations that he faced during his life and now especially at Harmony. He also sought to harmonize his mother's and father's differences in religion, please his new wife and her family, and find a church that could offer him association. Additionally, his
impoverished condition combined with his tarnished career in treasure-hunting, his court trial over money-digging, and his expulsion from the Methodists left him outside the usual religious and social climes. Hence, in Hill’s view, Joseph Smith’s strong sense of alienation was produced by a combination of environmental factors that together produced anxiety and alienation and led to a search for the pristine gospel.

In this imaginative revision (unless I misread it), Joseph’s early conversion experience (the First Vision), the translation of the Book of Mormon, and his final conversion to seekerism were brought about by distinct phenomena that separated the incidents in time and space. There was no specific connection of these events in Joseph’s mind until after his seekerism led him to assuming a prophetic role. In other words, the various first vision accounts are Joseph’s attempt to synthesize a series of religious experiences that occurred over a period of at least a decade into one single account of mythic proportions.

Hill, unlike Winn, does not overlook D. Michael Quinn’s work on Joseph’s magic worldview. He also provides a perspective for those who might find magic tied to Mormon beginnings unsettling. It is logically consistent, according to Hill, for those associated with a prereformation style of religion not only to look for the divine in magical forms, but also to be among the most fervent millennialists and seekers after a new Zion and a heavenly social order. Mormonism at its foundation was Joseph Smith’s attempt to revitalize this magic worldview and interweave it with some of the doctrines of Christianity to form a theocratic society void of the competition and corruption found “in the place where he lived.” Converts of this magical predilection saw their view of an omnipresent divinity bifurcated into two fiercely competitive factions—one sacred, the other profane. Mormonism promised unity by divine guidance.

Hill’s theocratic society or Winn’s “communal republic” was to be found only in the kingdom of God. Both authors agree that early Mormon writings present the notion of a kingdom separate from the United States. Oliver Cowdery, Parley Pratt, and Sidney Rigdon were only a few of the most prominent who wrote about the impending subjugation of the United States government by a Mormon theocracy. Caught up in millennial fervor, many of the early Saints looked toward an almost immediate Second Coming with themselves ruling with Christ. Hill contends that after a series of revelations dampened immediate millennial hopes, Joseph often had to stifle his more zealous followers from wanting to establish a kingdom by militant force.
Both Hill and Winn see Joseph Smith as having been convinced of a need for a separate kingdom by a series of events and turning points, including internal dissent, outside persecutions, political confrontations, and a failure to get redress from the local, state, and federal governments. According to Hill, his conversion to a separate kingdom came only after years of political involvement and attempts to save society as an insider. When President Van Buren refused aid in 1839, Joseph saw separation as the only possible route for the Mormons. Winn, while finding Van Buren's rejection important, sees continued hostility in Illinois and non-Mormon apathy toward Mormon grievances as evidence that the "great experiment" had collapsed. Joseph's campaign for the presidency was the American republic's last hope for salvation. Failing that, separation and building their own republic were the only solutions for the Mormons. Both authors, however, find temple rituals as well as the Nauvoo Legion and the Council of Fifty integral to an eventual Mormon political hegemony.

These two books also touch on other stimulating issues. Their analyses of the dissent at Kirtland and in Missouri are enlightening. Hill describes in great detail how dissent was formed, shaped, and handled by Church leaders. The more exclusive the organization became, the more the dissent grew. Additionally, Hill portrays disaffiliates like Orson Pratt, Orson Hyde, and Thomas B. Marsh as "human beings" whose views were shaped by what they experienced and thought. It was not simply the devil or some stolen milk that put these men at odds with Mormon ecclesiastical power. Neither was it simply a republican dissent. While Winn is aware of many of the dissenters' arguments as they relate to republican tenets of tyranny and natural rights, he fails to distinguish among the many dimensions of religious disaffiliation. Moreover, he tends to ignore those dissenters, such as Pratt, Hyde, and Marsh, who fail to fit his interpretive model.

In their accounts of the clashes between Mormons and their neighbors, Hill and Winn cite regional differences, pluralism, political abuses, and mutual hostility as key factors in the persecutions. More importantly, they distinguish the various perceptions the opposing sides had of each other. Missourians saw the Saints as belligerent, politically dangerous, and wanting their land. In Nauvoo, the rise of the kingdom was predicated upon the foundation of Apostles and prophets—a ruling elite. Joseph was viewed as a powerful religious leader who fused the role of speculator, political candidate, and commanding general of a standing army, and competed directly with the economic and political elite of the
counties and states. According to Hill, Mormon actions proceeded from a worldview that could not separate the sacred from the secular. From the Mormons’ perspective, they were persecuted only for religious reasons. Winn, in contrast, views these clashes as being between distinctive republican definitions. Thus both gentiles and Mormons saw their opposites as tyrannical and subversive to republican ideals.

Both authors, however, do need to reevaluate some of their thinking about the Kirtland experience. They contend that persecution was minimal in Kirtland because of the small population base, the little land acreage owned by the Mormons, and the inhabitants’ similar New England backgrounds. Winn incorrectly asserts that Ohioans never made the transition from exposure to political violence because the Saints posed no threat to Kirtland’s social structure. By 1837, Kirtland Mormons had twice the population of non-Mormons, owned most of the prime acres in the center of the community, and had effectively assumed the major political offices in the town. The community did not simply acquiesce because of their common backgrounds, but worked from a framework adapted from their New England heritage to handle community problems. Their town leaders met, determined that the Mormons were hostile to their interests, and then proceeded to implement several tactics in order to force the Mormons to leave. They “warned” them to leave, hired Philastus Hurlbut to expose their beliefs, took economic sanctions, and by 1836 began to use force. The persecution may not have been as dramatic as in Missouri or Nauvoo, but it was nevertheless strongly present.

More attention should also be given to how newspapers created an image of the Saints from which others could draw conclusions about Mormon intentions. What Ohioans said and did about the Mormons undoubtedly had an effect on how Missourians perceived the Saints. It may even have dictated some of the tactics they used. The same could be said of the people in Illinois. Certainly Thomas Sharp’s rhetoric was shaped by the Missourians’ perceptions of the Saints as presented in their newspapers. Thus, by the time the Mormons arrived in Nauvoo, a perceptual paradigm had already been set up from which their intentions could be judged and a plan for persecution could be drawn.

Perhaps a more serious criticism of Hill’s book involves his basic assumption about American pluralism. Hill cites James Madison’s *Federalist*, number 10, as proof of the Founding Fathers’ intention to insure that “no single interest group or ‘faction’ would be able to dominate,” thus protecting America’s
freedom. This interpretation has come under attack as anachronistic and distinctly modern.\(^3\) Hill is no doubt aware of the argument but fails to address it. With much of his interpretation based on this idea, this omission is conspicuous.

Winn has a similar interpretational problem. While the discussion over “republican” ideology has blossomed in the last decade, its definition is still imprecise. The age-old question of exactly to what extent general ideology actually motivates people is still unclear. Moreover, “classical republicanism” has become a vague term often substituted by historians for rigorous analysis. Finally, I am not sure if Winn gives us anything that Hill has not discussed already under the rubric of pluralism. The significance of Winn’s work, however, lies in his contributing to a growing body of literature that finds differing visions of classical republicanism as a major cause of conflict in early and antebellum America.\(^4\) The Mormons’ antebellum experience may prove an excellent microcosm from which to gain further insight into the events leading to the firing on Fort Sumter in 1861.

Both of these books are important for reasons already enumerated. The fact that Winn relies heavily on Hill’s work is indicative of the importance of *Quest for Refuge*. Marvin Hill has written a monograph that could well supplant Brodie’s *No Man Knows My History* as the book heralded by secular scholars as the definitive work on Mormon origins. Winn’s work, in contrast, has brought Mormonism into the mainstream of current historical debate. Both works are long overdue, and like our two friends who sought the grail and failed, Hill and Winn have given us, if not the chalice, at least “illumination.”

NOTES

1For the essence of Hill’s argument about Mormonism’s response to pluralism, see his “Counter-Revolution: The Mormon Reaction to the Coming of American Democracy,” *Sunstone* 13 (June 1989): 24–33.

2While Hill owes a great deal to Robert Flanders’s interpretation of Nauvoo, he differs markedly in his assertion that Joseph Smith was a “true believer” in his cause. Flanders often views the Mormon prophet as a megalomaniac vying only for power and status (see Robert Bruce Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965], esp. chaps. 4–6; see also Robert Bruce Flanders, “Dream and Nightmare: Nauvoo Revisited,” in *The Restoration Movement: Essays in Mormon History*, ed. F. Mark McKieman et al. (Independence, Mo.: Herald House Publishing, 1979), 141–66.


Reviewed by Charles R. Harrell, assistant professor of technology at Brigham Young University.

Brent Top’s informative and inspirational book *The Life Before* traces the idea of preexistence from early recorded history through the most current secular and LDS thinking on the subject. From the wealth of quotations alone, the book is a valuable reference book that any student of LDS doctrine will discover worth perusing. In this respect, the author has undertaken a commendable work of compilation and organization of subject matter.

The stated objective of the book is “to provide information that will enlighten the mind and prepare the heart for the inspiration that can change our lives and buoy us up spiritually as we pass through this second estate” [x]. The book succeeds in this regard by providing a positive and reaffirming witness of the doctrine.

The first chapter and a half, comprising twenty-three pages, gives a historical overview of the doctrine, presenting both ancient and modern beliefs, including glimpses of early Jewish and Christian teachings on preexistence. While most of the quotes bear directly on the subject, some have dubious relevancy, such as Herman Hesse’s notion of our inherited “ancestral past” of “slime and eggshells,” or M. Scott Peck’s related concept of “collective consciousness” that is the “inherited wisdom and experience of our ancestors.”

The remaining 176 pages of the book are devoted to expounding major LDS themes related to the doctrine of preexistence. Topics are treated on a level suited to a general Mormon audience and are kept well within the bounds of accepted LDS orthodoxy. Nearly every aspect of the doctrine is presented, with only a few topics omitted such as the origin of the sexes and the actual location of the preexistent spirit world.

Readers will find the author’s personal musings stimulating, such as the thought-provoking probe into the Father’s motive in asking “Whom shall I send?” knowing full well he had already chosen his firstborn. The war in heaven is especially well treated, with a comprehensive and thoughtful analysis of the issues involved.

The author broadens our perspective of the doctrine of foreordination by presenting numerous possible instances in which the doctrine applies. One aspect of foreordination does appear problematic, however. The author declares, “Among those
foreordained to the house of Israel were those who were further ordained to specific callings as ministers in the kingdom of God” (159). But if, as the author claims, no one receives the priesthood in this life unless he was foreordained to do so, and if those who are foreordained are among the most elect of those born into the house of Israel, then one is left wondering why the Church’s current policy is to ordain individuals to the priesthood regardless of lineage.

Overall, the book is well written, but there are a few aspects of the treatment of preexistence that caused me a bit of concern. The author sometimes lacks objectivity in treating issues and makes several blanket statements that are not well supported. For example, in spite of the numerous quotes from modern Christian thinkers in support of the doctrine of preexistence, Top insists that modern Christianity “vehemently” rejects the doctrine. Yet no evidence at all is presented to warrant this assertion. Further, the author accuses the Christian world of either ignoring or grossly misinterpreting New Testament teachings on preexistence.

This indictment seems a little harsh, especially in light of what is offered as being the “correct” interpretation of these teachings. On page 28, for example, Top presents Paul’s references to Christ as the “firstborn,” then asks, “How can Paul be referring to anything other than Christ’s preeminent role as firstborn of all of God’s spirit children?” Actually, it is quite possible that Paul may be using the term figuratively as he often did. For example, in Colossians 1:18 he refers to Christ as being “the firstborn from the dead.” By saying that the Savior was “the firstborn of every creature” (Col. 1:15), Paul may be merely calling attention to Christ’s preeminence as the first of the creations of the Father. (After all, if the statement were taken literally, all of God’s creations would be begotten, not just human beings.) The author himself points out later that the Hebrew word translated as “firstborn” actually means “preeminent one.”

Even if Paul did intend to convey that Christ was literally the firstborn of the father in the spirit, it does not necessarily follow that others were born as spirit children of God. To the contrary, Paul teaches that one reason we know that Christ was the firstborn is that everything else that came afterwards was created by Christ (Col. 1:15–16). Furthermore, Paul explicitly states that the way in which Christ becomes “the firstborn among many brethren” is through the righteous being adopted into the family of God (Rom. 8:29).

On page 31 and again on page 55, the author uses Romans 8:16 as evidence that we are the spirit offspring of God. Careful reading shows that this passage clearly refers to the adoption of the
righteous as children of God. In examining this passage and others referring to God as our Father (such as those cited on pages 26 and 27), it is interesting to consider the following observation made by Bruce R. McConkie:

Few doctrines are better known by members of the true church than the doctrine of preexistence. . . . What is not so well known is that nearly all the passages of scripture, both ancient and modern, which speak of God as our Father and of men on earth being the sons of God, have no reference to our birth in preexistence as the children of Elohim, but teach rather that Jehovah is our Father and we are his children.1

The point to be made is that most of Paul’s teachings that are cited by Top provide neither obvious nor conclusive evidence of a spirit birth and certainly do not warrant dismissing alternative scholarly interpretations as being gross misinterpretations.

Even some modern scriptures and teachings are used as proof texts by the author in an attempt to provide added support for the doctrine of preexistence. The doctrine of a literal spirit birth, for example, is represented as being consistently and “emphatically” taught from the time of Joseph Smith to the present. To say that Joseph Smith emphatically taught the doctrine is a bit of an overstatement since no recorded teachings of the Prophet exist wherein he taught that God is the literal father of our spirits. The two references that are cited (55) are at best tenuous as a support for spirit birth. The first reference, for example, is D&C 76:23–24, which has been interpreted by many authorities (not to mention the interpretation given in the subject matter summary at the beginning of the section) as having reference to spiritual rebirth, not premortal spirit birth. The second quotation attributed to Joseph Smith is actually the Prophet quoting Paul (Rom. 8:16) with apparent reference only to the doctrine of adoption and not to spirit birth.

I raise these objections, not to disprove Top’s thesis, but only to express disapproval of the methodology in which such tenuous evidence is used to strengthen the support for the doctrine of preexistence. There is ample evidence of scriptural and authoritative support for preexistence without the need to reach for questionable evidence.

One of the more interesting discussions in the book is on the nature of intelligence. Unfortunately, the labels given to the two schools of thought on intelligence are too restrictive given the references cited. Top’s obvious intention is to discuss whether we had a beginning as individuals or whether we always existed individually. The label he gives to the first school of thought, however, is “Intelligence, the Primal Element,” which does not
represent the full range of beliefs cited in the quotations on intelligence. While some references do equate intelligence with spirit element (Bruce R. McConkie and Charles Penrose), others define intelligence as an inherent attribute of primal spirit element (Parley P. Pratt). A third view considers intelligence to be a quickening agent infused into spirit element by God (Brigham Young, Joseph Fielding Smith).

The author admits that the issue of whether or not we always existed as individuals is unsettled, yet the evidence presented is clearly weighted in favor of the belief that individuals were created. Only Orson Pratt and B. H. Roberts (each of whose credentials are undermined) are cited as proponents of eternal individualism, even though it is the only view that has been presented in general conferences in recent years. Despite the author’s apparent effort at objectivity, his own bias is apparent.

With respect to premortal progression, the author represents Brigham Young and Joseph Fielding Smith as teaching that differences in the attainment of intelligence are due solely to the exercise of agency. Not represented is the fact that both of these Church leaders also taught that spirits were created with varying capacities and that this also accounts for differences in level of progression.2

In addition to these examples where passages and teachings are not presented as objectively or as completely as they might have been, the book contains several minor errors, such as references to Cicero and Seneca as Greek philosophers rather than Romans. Eliza R. Snow’s hymn “O My Father” is also erroneously dated to 1843 instead of 1845, thereby giving the false impression that the doctrine of spirit birth was well established during the Prophet’s lifetime.

Overall, the book is much more uplifting than disturbing, and I recommend it without reservation to general LDS readers. If the author’s occasional overzealousness can be overlooked, the book also contains many thought-provoking ideas worth examining by the serious scholar. The author has done an admirable job of conveying the spiritual depth and far-reaching impact of the doctrine.

NOTES


In a time when it has become difficult for scholars whose expertise is increasingly limited by their own specialization to communicate across disciplinary boundaries, a work that both contributes importantly to its own discipline and shares vital human concerns beyond its captive audience is genuinely worthy of celebration. For this reason alone, Wayne C. Booth’s *The Company We Keep* marks, for me, a high point in the recent history of literary studies. And, perhaps more importantly, it rejuvenates the once powerful idea that reading stories can indeed influence the development of character, our day-to-day ethical practices. The fundamental purpose of the book is to provide readers with a legitimate means of talking about stories and character without jumping too quickly to dogmatic conclusions that limit our capacity to make complex ethical choices. Since it would be impossible to offer all of Booth’s ideas in a short review, I will address what I believe to be three of the more powerful critical tools he provides us for ethical discourse about literature: the languages of pluralism, friendship, and emulation (“hypocrisy upward”).

Somewhat surprisingly, pluralism has gotten a bad name in the last twenty years or so. (Like criticism, it has taken on negative connotations and lost, for too many, its genuine meaning.) One of Booth’s important lifetime projects has been salvaging the idea of pluralism from attacks from groups he calls in this book “lumpers” and pursuers of “openness.” In other contexts, these groups might be called monists and relativists, but both are characterized by Booth as dogmatic. “Lumpers” choose to see the world always from one perspective, believing that their vista is singularly and always absolutely correct. Pursuers of openness accept all values, recognizing the existence of a variety of viewpoints but denying the need for evaluation of ideas and points of view.

In literary criticism, moral lumpers have chosen to take stands against novels, plays, and poems for a variety of different reasons, but the general goal has almost always been the same. They want a work banned or rejected outright on the grounds that it contains some material that may be offensive to a particular group’s values or because they perceive its influence to be corrupting. Most of us are aware of this mode of thinking and even have favorite examples
of valuable works that shortsighted, narrow-minded readers have had banned for what they call "moral" reasons.

Perhaps more prevalent among academic literary critics today are the purveyors of openness. This mode of thinking recommends accepting a much broader literary canon than has traditionally been considered. It dogmatically rejects the idea that ethical evaluation has any role in the literary critical enterprise. Booth's critique of openness (that it rejects any possible dialogue about ethical standards among academic critics and ordinary readers alike) is extremely elucidating in the light of Allan Bloom's recent critique of openness in *The Closing of the American Mind*. While Bloom rejects the notion that you or I will ever be capable of understanding why certain books should be read or not, Booth presents us with genuine tools for making important distinctions ourselves. Bloom believes that only an elite can read well, but Booth sees us all making educated, ethical decisions while reading and thereby building a better and more democratic society. While Bloom's work often relies on polemic and rather loosely constructed arguments, Booth presents clear, well-developed arguments and a wide variety of careful ethical readings of many different works to illustrate the viability of his method. In fact, Booth's demonstrations of pluralist understanding show us how we actually can make ethical evaluations.

The capacity for understanding other people's views is the centerpiece of Booth's pluralism. But along with understanding comes the need to ask serious questions of the works we read and to let them ask similar questions of us. Pluralism does not reject truth; instead, it recognizes that in practice truth can only be found among various, often competing ideas. Booth recognizes that this is especially true when we read works of fiction. A major difficulty anyone attempting ethical criticism faces is finding a method appropriate to achieving ethical understanding. As Booth states when talking about standards of evaluation, "The goal is not to pack into our traveling bag only the best that has been thought and said but to find forms of critical talk that will improve the range or depth or precision of our appreciations" (113). It is not only important to know what is best but also why. The complexity of his model makes it difficult for a reviewer to present all of its details, but the general metaphor Booth develops and explores makes his pluralism quite clear: books as friends.

While talk of books as friends, or of friendship as requiring ethical evaluation, is hardly new, Booth has found a very rich and rewarding merger of these two ideas in his notion that the offers made to their readers by works of fiction are very similar to offers
of friendship made from one person to another. As the phrase “the company we keep” clearly implies, one crucial set of judgments we all make as living, thinking, human beings involves the friends we choose and the lasting rewards good friendships bring to good lives. But what are the criteria we use for determining who our friends are? Are those criteria as dogmatic as some of our rejections of works of fiction? Are they as open as some of our standards for art have become?

Before Booth discusses criteria for friendship, he distinguishes among different kinds of friends. Borrowing Aristotle’s classifications, Booth presents three categories of friendship: useful, pleasant, and self-justifying. As we can readily see, our reading can also fall into these three different categories. We regularly choose to read stories because they seem to us to be useful or pleasurable, but these seldom are stories that we come back to more than once. The most important kind of friendship, the kind that lasts a lifetime and leads to better lives, justifies itself. This is the analogy Booth wants to have inform our ethical studies of fiction.

Self-justifying friendships are those that allow both friends to build better moral character by virtue of their association. If we think of our own best friends, we will likely discover that the reason we like them so much is that we are edified (morally built up) when we are around them. The best works of fiction offer us the chance to become better people by virtue of having associated with the characters they present. As Booth maintains,

Most of the great stories show characters of a moral quality roughly equal to that of the implied reader [the reader the author expects to read the book, a distinction Booth introduced in The Rhetoric of Fiction] . . . ; the plots are built out of the characters’ efforts to face moral choices. In tracing those efforts, we readers stretch our own capacities for thinking about how life should be lived, as we join those more elevated judges, the implied authors. We cannot quite consider ourselves their equals: they are more skillful than we at providing such exercises in moral discernment. But they imply that we might become their equals in discernment if we only practiced long enough. (187)

If we think for a moment of the characters we have encountered in the finest works we have read—Alyosha Karamazov, Levin, Stephen Dedalus, Huckleberry Finn, Elizabeth Bennet, Pip, Dorothea Brooke, even Flem Snopes—we recognize that their dilemmas are our dilemmas. How they choose to live, as explored by the authors of their stories, allows us to think seriously about how we might make similar choices. Do we choose them as friends, or not? Do our encounters really make us better moral agents?
If we are, in reality, moral agents, it would seem that we would never be compelled to make choices that are bad for us. But experience tells us otherwise. Many offers of friendship end up, as they did for Pinocchio, transforming us into something we never wanted to become. Hence the need for us to make informed choices about what we read, and hence the desire to emulate the best we can find. Booth calls this kind of emulation “hypocrisy upward”: hypocrisy because we are pretending to be something we are not yet, and upward because we hope to become better by acting better.

One of the more distressing discoveries any of us makes can be learning about the real life of an author whose work we genuinely admire. Milton was cruel to his daughters; Shakespeare spent years away from his wife; Moses killed an Egyptian; Faulkner was an alcoholic. Great writers, as imperfect as they often are, aspire to teach us to be better than they were. They are sometimes the worst examples of “do as I say, not as I do.” But the point of talking about hypocrisy upward is not to focus on the real moral weaknesses of actual authors. We are interested, after all, in the effects of reading on the readers themselves. How does this story affect me?

In this section, I believe we find Booth at his critical best. Today, many critics would characterize any talk about emulation as silly and naive. For them, literature is much more than presentation of idealized characters and life-styles for us simply to identify with. And those critics are right to a degree. It is quite foolish for us to identify with soap-opera characters, sports stars, romance heroines, or the sappy characters of many popular novels aimed at the LDS market. “But readers who engage in a story, readers who enter the pattern of hopes, fears, and expectations that every story asks for, will always take on ‘characters’ that are superior, on the scale of a book’s fixed norms, to the relatively complex, erratic, and paradoxical characters that they cannot help being in their daily lives” (255). Even more than this, though, the desire to emulate real friends as well as the friends we find in stories keeps us alive to moral growth and development. “When we lose our capacity to succumb, when we reach a point at which no other character can manage to enter our imaginative or emotional or intellectual territory and take over, at least for the time being, then we are dead on our feet” (257). We do not make a few simple choices that fix our characters for the rest of our lives. Character is vital and grows with each successive encounter with, for example, a new neighbor or someone from another country. But it also “changes, grows, and diminishes largely as a result of our imaginative diet” (257). Hence the need for a pluralistic outlook that allows
us to seek character in a variety of areas, *trying* all things and holding fast to the good.

I have not entered into the very sophisticated account of the actual decision-making process Booth’s majestic work offers. I leave that to the reader who is willing to invest the hours such a work requires. Let me conclude, however, by saying that the implied author here makes us an offer we can hardly refuse. This Booth is a man whose virtues we do not want to live without, whose sincere concern with our character is laudable in the highest sense. As Booth says to those who have moved him to higher ground, I feel comfortable saying in return:

You lead me first to practice ways of living that are more profound, more sensitive, more intense, and in a curious way more fully generous than I am likely to meet anywhere else in the world. You correct my faults, rebuke my insensitivities. You mold me into patterns of longing and fulfillment that make my ordinary dreams seem petty and absurd. You finally show what life can be, not just to a coterie, a saved and saving remnant looking down on the fools, slobs, and knaves, but to *anyone* who is willing to work to earn the title of equal and true friend. (223)


Reviewed by Armand L. Mauss, professor of sociology and religious studies at Washington State University.

In recent years, scholars like “Ben” Bennion and Larry Foster have discovered that nineteenth-century Mormon polygamy (strictly speaking, polygyny) was far more pervasive and influential than we had realized. Indeed, as an institution, polygamy was Utah’s analogue to Southern slavery. Though perhaps not involving a majority of the population, nevertheless it was extensive enough to be a *formative* institution, one that influenced nearly every aspect of the culture in one way or another. Such is the major theme of Logue’s book, whether intentionally or not. Almost as if in metaphor, the theme of polygamy permeates the book just as the institution permeated social life in St. George of the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s.

In some ways the book does not deliver what it promises in the preface, where we are led to expect a comprehensive community
case study with broad theoretical significance. What we get, as it turns out, is an important but limited study of family and religion, as understood through census and diary data, but very little about the other important institutions of the town. What passes for “theory” here, furthermore, is a series of plausible explanations, rather than anything at the global level of the venerable “frontier thesis,” or even at the “lower order” of theory to which the author aspires. I do not mean to denigrate the author’s explanatory creativity, which is an important contribution in itself, but the reader does not really find much here that can be generalized theoretically.

We do get a tremendously inventive blending of demographic and diary data from which the author draws a number of intriguing inferences about the whys and wherefores of life in St. George. This blend of qualitative and quantitative data is frequently compared with findings from community studies of other contemporaneous towns, both in Utah and elsewhere in the United States, so that we have a basis for judging whether this or that aspect of St. George life was really unique for its time. (Sometimes it was and sometimes it wasn’t.) When the author’s explanations stay close to his data, they are quite convincing, but now and then he overreaches the data.

Two examples will illustrate. In comparing infant mortality in St. George with that in other American communities, the author finds an anomaly: The infant mortality rate during the first year of life was relatively low in St. George, though eventually (by age five) it pretty well converged with that in the rest of the country. Why was it so low at first? From diary and other documentary accounts, the author finds strong evidence that breast-feeding was much more common, and of longer duration, in St. George than elsewhere. Accordingly, the smallest infants benefited both by natural immunity from mothers’ milk and by suppressed ovulation, which tended to reduce the risk of early conception of a successor sibling. That’s all pretty plausible and is an interesting example of interaction between cultural customs and demographic variables.

On the other hand, when the author finds that mortality rates for adult women were higher than those for adult men in St. George (even when compared to the rest of the country), he blames patriarchal privilege with very slim evidence indeed. As far as I can tell, the evidence consists solely of occasional references in diaries to the self-sacrificing proclivities of women. We cannot tell whether St. George women were more likely than men to glorify (or even accept) self-sacrifice, or whether they were more likely to do so than other pioneer women. Nevertheless, the author draws the inference that the women were giving up their food for the men in
the name of patriarchy and self-sacrifice, with the consequence of higher mortality from malnutrition. This undocumented claim is an entirely unnecessary violation of the principle of parsimony in scientific explanation. Certainly a sufficient explanation for higher rates of female mortality can be found in the higher average frequency and duration of childbearing (compared to elsewhere), which the author had already established.

The main contribution of the book will be found in chapters 3, 4, and 5, dealing respectively with marriage, fertility, and mortality. In these chapters the author leads us through a kind of dialogue between demographic data and diary accounts. From this dialogue he "teases out" the kinds of intriguing inferences noted above about daily life in early St. George. He is inventive in filling gaps in the demographic record, but he is also meticulous in explaining the risks that he has run in doing so. Two methodological appendixes detail his techniques for using diaries (appendix A) and demographic data (appendix B). The first two chapters give us an overview, drawn from secondary sources, of the early history and religious beliefs of the people of St. George. An epilogue reviews the major implications of the study and how they fit with Mormon (and other) history more generally. To the academically savvy, the book has the appearance of a revised dissertation (chapters 3, 4, 5, and the appendixes) to which have been grafted the opening two chapters and the epilogue. It must be conceded, though, that this process has been done more smoothly and skillfully than with most revised dissertations.

Besides his display of an unusual and impressive methodological virtuosity, the author's main contribution in this work, in my opinion, lies in what it reveals about the far-reaching implications of polygamy. Logue employs an unusual way of measuring the extensiveness of polygamy. On the assumption that most husbands, wives, and children lived in relationships that were sometimes monogamous and sometimes polygamous (depending on the comings and goings of new and departing wives), he argues that the most meaningful way to calculate the extent of polygamy is in person-years, which he then does for men, women, and children. The result validates (but does not greatly inflate) the findings of other recent investigations into this matter: polygamy in early St. George (and probably in most other Utah towns) involved more than a third of the person-years of the men, three-fourths of the person-years of the women, and more than half of the person-years of the children (50–51).

Among the "ripples" issuing from such pervasive polygamy was a chronic shortage of marriageable women, since there was no
appreciable imbalance in the general sex ratio. This shortage, in turn, pushed down the average age at marriage for all females, whether polygamous or monogamous. Early marriage age, of course, meant a longer average duration of childbearing, which pushed the St. George fertility rate (and, by inference, that of Utah?) well above the national average for the time. Thus, while it is true that polygamous wives had no more children than did monogamous wives (and often fewer), the average fertility of all wives was increased by the general impact of polygamy on marriage age. The resulting abundance of children in the hand-to-mouth economy of St. George was no blessing as it might have been in other agricultural sections of the country, where children were sometimes an economic asset.

I found myself wishing that the author had explored some of the other likely concomitants of polygamy, bride shortages, and poverty. Two that come to mind are divorce and the forced out-migration of the young men who were unable to “score” in either the marriage market or the labor market. We know that divorce was not uncommon in polygamous Utah, and that it was often initiated by a wife. The author even cites one example (105), but the reader suspects that more data on divorce must have been available to the researcher. Such data, especially in the able hands of this author, might have given us still more insights into the implications of polygamy, especially for disaffected women. On the second issue, the predicament of unattached young men, one wonders where they went. Did they stay in Utah? Did they stay in the Church? Did such extensive polygamy have the ironic and unintended consequence of driving off some of even the devout male youth?

This book, at the very least, ought to add more weight to the mounting evidence that, one hopes, will eventually bring the collapse, once and for all, of so many of the myths that have accumulated through the years about Mormon polygamy, to wit:

1. polygamy was not very extensive;
2. polygamy was necessitated in part by a shortage of eligible men;
3. polygamy was mainly a charitable institution to take care of aging and widowed women;
4. polygamy was practiced only by the more wealthy;
5. polygamy worked to the economic advantage of at least the men;
6. polygamy produced more children per woman than monogamy did;
7. polygamy was the resort mainly of old men, an arrangement, in other words, for patriarchal old geezers to exchange daughters and granddaughters;
8. polygamy originated and was sustained by a variety of motives, some of them pragmatic, some of them ignoble, but religion was mainly a post-hoc rationale.
All of these myths (some of them mutually incompatible) have been propounded by either apologetics or antagonists or both. It is hard to sustain any of them in the face of the evidence provided in this fine study. In particular, the fundamentally religious basis for polygamy becomes undeniable in the context of the extraordinarily unfavorable cost-benefit ratio that accompanied it for almost all participants, at least in St. George. Those people knew what “the law of sacrifice” really meant!


Reviewed by Grant Underwood, director of the LDS Institute of Religion, Pomona, California.

Several years ago, Dan Vogel published an article in The Journal of Pastoral Practice expressing his view that the Book of Mormon “is a nineteenth-century religious fictional book” filled with anachronisms and other “blunders.” “There can be no other explanation,” he wrote, than that the Book of Mormon is “a modern composition” rather than an ancient text.1 With Religious Seekers, Vogel has produced a book-length monograph viewing Mormonism in toto as modern religious syncretism. While he has learned to package his argument so as to make it more palatable to Latter-day Saints, Religious Seekers is actually one more in a long line of books attempting to show that Mormonism was more derivative than divine. Through a methodology comparable to a game of definitional “Twister,” Vogel is able to turn almost anyone into a “Seeker,” and then to read Mormonism as nothing less than Seekerism redivivus.

From the outset, Vogel is headed down the wrong path. In order to make his case for “the enormous influence of Seekerism” (217), he first has to reify it. Vogel is not content with the traditional scholarly designation as lowercase “seekers” of those spiritual nomads in any age for whom institutional Christianity was effete and who awaited a recrudescence of genuine religion. The observation that such individuals were attracted to the Mormon church is as old as John Greenleaf Whittier and has been made with regularity ever since. But Vogel insists on portraying them as a coherent “sect” or “movement” with a definite set of beliefs. Hence his use of “Seeker” rather than “seeker.”
Yet the latest scholarship sees "little objective evidence" that "Seekers" or "Seekerism" existed even in mid seventeenth-century England, where heresy hunters first popularized the term as an epithet. Led by British historians Frank McGregor and J. C. Davis, the past decade has witnessed a careful reassessment, which Vogel overlooks, of radicalism and religion in the era of the English Revolution.\textsuperscript{2} Under attack is "the appropriateness of attaching sectarian labels (often of hostile origin) to people or groups with little or no visible sectarian organization."\textsuperscript{3} According to McGregor, "there survive no Seeker confessions of faith," and there exist "no unambiguous statements of the Seeker position as a guide to religious life." Beyond "a common inability to find [spiritual] comfort in allegiance to a particular church and to some degree a millenarian belief that an age of greater religious understanding was at hand," such people "are characterized by doctrinal diversity." Simply put, "There was no sect of Seekers in revolutionary England."\textsuperscript{4}

The problems with Vogel's conceptualization only increase as the book progresses. Inexplicably, after some discussion of the seventeenth century the reader is suddenly jolted into the nineteenth century as if there were no interim history to be negotiated or continuity to be established. Once there, nineteenth-century "Seekers" are described in plurality and abundance, yet time and again it is only Asa Wild or occasionally Erastus Hanchett who is being quoted. Where are all the others? Two unassociated and, at times, doctrinally unrelated individuals do not constitute a sect, let alone a movement. Above all, the fact that they had no documented contact with Joseph Smith or other Latter-day Saints places discussion of their influence on Mormonism in the realm of counterfactual speculation.

Once the objective reality of "Seekerism" as either sect or ideology is denied, Vogel's basic thesis collapses, and his constant use of the term as a baseline referent with which to compare Mormonism becomes an exercise in artificiality. The most that can be said is that Vogel has found certain individuals who at some point in their lives seem to have held some views similar to those of some early LDS converts. While this may be interesting in and of itself, it certainly does not prove derivation. Admittedly, Asa Wild expressed views that would have been acceptable to most Mormons, but then so have a host of other individuals. Early Saints had a good deal in common with various Christian groups in antebellum America, but that does not make them intellectually dependent nor does it establish influence. Richard Bushman has wisely noted that "the actual complexities of identifying the
sources of Mormon belief and experience” make the “attempt to trace all the images, ideas, language, and emotional structure of a movement as elaborate as Mormonism” manifestly “elusive and futile.”

While in and of itself Religious Seekers does not warrant a long review, the methodological mistakes it contains crop up again and again in such literature and need to be identified. Many years ago, Perry Miller declared that what one finds in seventeenth-century New England is one-tenth Puritanism and nine-tenths a culture common to all English people. “Their attitudes towards all sorts of things,” wrote Miller, “are pounced upon and exhibited as peculiarities of their sect, when as a matter of fact they were normal attitudes of the time.” This is especially true of Vogel’s treatment of Seekers. Much of what he implies is uniquely “Seeker” has actually been widespread in Christian history. Prime examples include an emphasis on spiritual gifts or millenarianism. Even together, such ideas have been present in diverse sectors of Christianity from the second-century Montanists to the nineteenth-century Irvingites. Or consider Asael Smith. Vogel labels his perfectly routine expressions of rational Christianity as “Seeker” perspectives (26-27). Even the later family recollection, undocumented in Asael Smith’s own writings, of a vaguely “seeker” hope that something would “turn up” to “make known the true gospel” is hardly sufficient to set him apart from others. Christendom has always harbored dissatisfied souls who yearned for a restoration of pristine purity and who had given up on human efforts to achieve it.

Another procedural problem is Vogel’s procrustean efforts to manipulate the past so that it always fits his thesis. This is apparent, for instance, when he strains to distinguish Seekers from Primitivists. Since Primitivists, especially of the “Campbellite” kind, have long been recognized as forerunners to Mormonism, in order to have something new to say Vogel has to contrive a separate category for his subjects rather than allow them to remain where other scholars have placed them. On the other hand, Lucy Mack Smith, whose explicit and extended search for genuine religion led both Marvin Hill and Richard Bushman to label her a “seeker,” is excluded from the “Seekers” by Vogel because she sought baptism. For him, only those sufficiently anticlerical to forego the ordinances qualify. If one expressed intense desire to see true religion restored, but tarried with a church nonetheless, he would be a “conservative Primitivist.” Yet if he had little more than a general hope for an improved religious scene but was unaffiliated, he could be a radical “Seeker” by Vogel’s typology. A more satisfying
classification, however, is Richard Hughes’s distinction “between ecclesiastical primitivism, wherein the forms and structures of the apostolic church are of paramount concern; ethical primitivism, wherein the lifestyle of the ancient Christians is the chief concern; and experiential primitivism, wherein the apostolic gifts of the Spirit are of ultimate concern.”

For a work pretending to be history, there is also a profound ahistoricalism about Religious Seekers. Vogel feels quite comfortable bouncing the reader back and forth between the centuries as if “Seekerism” were some kind of static unity, a Platonic archetype, entirely untouched by history. A quote from the seventeenth century is used just as readily as, and often in juxtaposition to, one from the nineteenth century when attempting to make connections with Mormonism. Historians of thought and doctrine, however, have long since abandoned such timeless linkages, preferring to see meaning as something inextricably bound up in history and language rather than something that moves unchanged in and out of minds across the decades. Speaking of seventeenth-century “Seekers,” Scott reminds us that the “particular and rapid sequence of political and military events” in Civil War England was the very “backbone upon which radicalism was made flesh and in isolation from which it cannot be understood.” Theology is inescapably, if at times imperceptibly, related to social, economic, and political situations. Though words may remain the same across the span of years, they can mask significant ideological differences, and intellectual historians constantly warn us to place them within their proper “community of discourse.”

Yet Vogel seems oblivious to the fact that when Lucy Mack Smith used the term “Seeker” to refer to her brother Jason Mack, she had something different in mind than did Puritan heresiographer Thomas Edwards. Or Vogel repeatedly links Erastus Hanchett with seventeenth-century “Seekers” even though the full title of his tract discloses a very specific setting that would need to be fully explored in order to understand him in context: A Serious Call in Christian Love, to All People; in the form of a Letter to Henry Colman, Minister of the Unitarian Independent Congregational Church Society, in Salem, Mass. Being an answer in part to a Book which he read to his people on the 7th December, 1824, at the opening of a New Meeting House. Nineteenth-century figures simply are not ideologically indistinguishable from individuals who lived two centuries earlier in a different religious world. Text must never be severed from context, for the full meaning of a tract or treatise can only be captured by recreating the religious idiom of the day. It is this very critical methodological flaw that allows
polemicists—antagonist or apologist—of every religious stripe to rewrite history as if it were the systematic unfolding of their own peculiar emphases.

Vogel’s inattentiveness to context not only allows him to exaggerate the “Seeker” phenomenon, but mars his approach to Mormonism as well. Here a different kind of ahistoricalism prevails. Vogel falls into the common trap of assuming that Mormon scriptures can be used ipso facto as evidence of early Mormon belief. While this is true in some respects, it fails to properly account for that crucial mediating link between the written text and the actual life and teaching of the Church—interpretation. Just as the Declaration of Independence was understood very differently in the eighteenth century from the way modern Americans view it, so too it cannot merely be assumed that what a modern reader sees in a given passage from early Mormon scripture is what a Latter-day Saint in the 1830s would have understood by that same passage. Nor can it be assumed that both individuals would have found the same passage noteworthy to begin with. Perhaps it is a lingering nineteenth-century belief in the perspicuity of scripture that leads writers such as Vogel to assume an identity of understanding between themselves and their subjects. Or perhaps he is simply unaware of the numerous primary source “interpretations” from that period that do exist, ranging from passing comment to lengthy exegesis. Whatever the case, Religious Seekers is seriously marred by the fact that far too often what is depicted in the book is Vogel’s eisegetical reading of the revelations rather than the views of those he purports to be describing.

There are also other reasons why Religious Seekers presents a view of Mormonism that many readers will find unpersuasive. Former Mormon Vogel romanticizes the late 1820s and early 1830s much as former Mormon David Whitmer did a hundred years earlier in An Address to All Believers in Christ. Vogel does not believe that Joseph Smith initially had any idea that a church would be organized, despite the fact that earlier in the book Vogel identifies concern for a restoration of authentic church forms as the touchstone of Seekerism. In fact, he cites Doctrine and Covenants, section 5 (March 1829), as “the first hint that God would establish a church” (34). In any case, before Sidney Rigdon came on the scene, structure was minimal, inspiration was general, and Joseph was just one among peers. Then the bogeyman of institutionalization set in. Gone were the halcyon days of popular charisma. Gone was the personal nature of Joseph Smith’s first vision or encounter with Moroni. Priesthood was invented as ecclesiology
was elaborated, and soon a full-blown hierarchy, with Joseph at the
top of the pyramid, was in place. As the Church grew and as Joseph
took power to himself, the early history had to be rewritten to reflect
the new state of affairs. Hence the unreliability of the Prophet’s
1838 and 1842 accounts.

These ideas, however, are not profound new historical truths
but old anti-Mormon chestnuts. It is by no means settled, as Vogel
wishes to have it, that only the 1832 and possibly the 1835 account
of Joseph’s early experiences are historically accurate. But even if
they were, such apparent source scrupulosity is compromised by
inconsistency. While repudiating the historical legitimacy of
Joseph’s 1838 and 1842 narratives, Vogel uncritically accepts
numerous later recollections of other individuals as if they were
authentic historical accounts. For instance, he takes at face value
Martin Harris’s 1870 recollections of an encounter with the Spirit
in 1818 (40) yet questions the Prophet’s later descriptions of his
1820 encounter with God. Similarly, David Whitmer’s memory of
men and motives at a remove of more than fifty years is given
unchallenged credence without so much as a nod at potential
problems, not the least of which might be the “sour grapes”
syndrome. Yet other Mormons who remember the early years in
more traditional ways are dismissed. On the other hand, when
Vogel wants to stress the millenarian interests of Joseph Smith he
lets the 1838 account that the angel Moroni “quoted biblical
prophecies concerning the Second Coming and the destruction of
the wicked” (185) stand as evidence, despite the fact that the
scriptural recitation is never mentioned in the 1832 text or that he
elsewhere argues for a decline of millenarianism after Zion’s Camp
in 1834!

In the final analysis, Religious Seekers is not a volume that
can be recommended. Despite a veneer of learning—and here it
must be noted that Vogel has a tendency to create long footnotes on
the most trivial or noncontroversial points, while letting crucial
claims go unsupported by evidence—the book distorts Mormon
and Christian history alike. Flawed in conceptualization and forced
in exposition, Vogel’s thesis is a house of cards that ultimately
collapses under scholarly scrutiny. The author, and others working
in the same genre, would do well to take a lesson from the history
of New Testament studies. For a time, earlier in this century, it
seemed that the sources of Christianity had been located in the
Hellenistic environment in which it developed. Scholars such as
Wilhelm Bousset and Kirsopp Lake popularized the startling find
that Christianity was heavily influenced both liturgically and
conceptually by the mystery religions. Today that claim draws
little attention and less support. Identifying parallels is not the same as establishing provenance. In the end, Mormonism, like Christianity, must be accounted for in ways that neither deny the arthen vessel nor reject the heavenly treasure placed therein.

NOTES

3Scott, “Radicalism and Restoration,” 454.
8Scott, “Radicalism and Restoration,” 455.
Cycle of Mothers and Daughters

Last week I glanced in the mirror quickly
as I hurried by the bathroom with an armload
of dirty socks.

But it was your face I saw
staring questioningly back at me,
not mine.

Startled, I stopped and drew closer,
examining for the record
the few strands of graying hair,
the puffy eyelids, the creased face.

And it was your weathered hand
that tried in vain to smooth back the wrinkles,
not mine.

I used to think our paths were worlds apart,
you and I, and now find that after all,
I have met you on your path, in the process
of finding mine.

—Cherie L. Burket

Cherie L. Burket is a poet living in Fort Thomas, Kentucky.
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