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CHAPTER 5

WHO REALLY WROTE THE BOOK OF MORMON? THE CRITICS AND THEIR THEORIES

Louis C. Midgley

The faith of Latter-day Saints is grounded in the Book of Mormon. It is not an exaggeration to say that “non-Mormons become Mormons when they respond to Mormonism’s fundamental truth claims by taking the Book of Mormon at face value.”¹ More than anything else, what distinguishes those who are Latter-day Saints from those who are not is the belief that the Book of Mormon is exactly what it claims to be and also that Joseph Smith’s story of its recovery is simply true. Since the beginning of the restoration, those who have encountered the Book of Mormon tend to be divided into opposing camps, one of which treats it as just a strange—though perhaps interesting—book, and nothing more, while the other accepts its network of truth claims as a valid description of past events and as a genuinely prophetic guide to the future.²

To satisfy legal requirements in New York, the 1830

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edition of the Book of Mormon listed Joseph Smith as its author. But as Joseph and the volume itself explains, he was the “translator” of an ancient composition; the actual authors were a series of ancient prophets who for over a thousand years had inscribed their sacred history on metal plates. Joseph merely claimed that by the power of God he was able to “translate” into English the Book of Mormon from an ancient record that had been delivered to him by an angelic messenger.

When one is confronted with the Book of Mormon and the story of its recovery, the decisive question is whether it is—as it claims—a divinely inspired, providentially recorded and preserved account of an ancient people separated from the inhabitants of the Old World, recorded on metal plates, revealed to Joseph Smith by an angel who was also once a participant in the events it records. Latter-day Saints hold that the book is precisely what it purports to be. They believe that it was translated “by the gift and power of God”³ and that it contains the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as well as other important prophetic teachings. On the other hand, precisely because of the crucial role of the Book of Mormon in grounding and forming the content of the faith and memory of Latter-day Saints, critics strive to provide a plausible alternative to the Mormon account of its authorship. Critics claim that the Book of Mormon is entirely a modern book—a product of the nineteenth-century culture in which it was initially published. Hence the issues surrounding the authorship of the Book of Mormon come down to an either-or choice: is the book an ancient or modern composition? Was Joseph Smith a genuine prophet or not?

The theories of the critics on the authorship of the Book of Mormon tend to fall into four general categories:

1. The initial Smith Theory, which theorizes that Joseph Smith wrote the book as a conscious fraud.
2. Later psychological variations on the Smith Theory, in which Joseph Smith wrote the book under the influence of some sort of paranoia or demonic possession or dissociative illusion; in some cases the critics conclude that Joseph knew that the book so produced was a modern fraud, while others conclude that it is a modern book that Joseph himself believed was ancient.
3. A conspiracy theory, which holds that Joseph Smith had the help of someone like Sidney Rigdon in creating the book as a conscious fraud, probably borrowing from some other source, such as the Spalding manuscript.
4. A divine fiction theory, the most recent variation on the Smith Theory, which holds that Joseph Smith wrote the book while under some sort of “religious inspiration,” so that while it is modern fiction, it at least holds some religious value.

Those who insist on reading the Book of Mormon as a modern book began in the earliest years by advancing what I call the Smith Theory;⁴ that is, they held that it was written by Joseph Smith. Some have simply dismissed it as ridiculous without really examining it. Jan Shipps has identified some of the reasons why:

The tale of an unsophisticated farm boy who found some engraved metal plates and used “magic spectacles” to translate therefrom a thousand years of pre-Columbian American history appears so incredible to many non-Mormons that they simply dismiss the prophet’s visions as hallucinations, regard his “golden bible” as a worthless document, and wonder how any intelligent person could ever accept it as true.⁵

Those who simply reject the Book of Mormon and the story of its recovery have tended to deal with both by claiming that the whole thing amounts to imposition, delusion, and superstition—to fraud, intentional or otherwise. Those with sectarian religious connections have very often added the word *blasphemy* to their list of epithets.

Other critics who believe Joseph Smith is the author and who look further into the contents of the book see in the Book of Mormon only indications of whatever Joseph Smith might have found in his own immediate, nineteenth-century environment. They argue, for example, that the book is laced with obvious parallels to various nineteenth-century speculations tying the pre-Columbian inhabitants of the Americans and especially the American Indians to Israel's lost tribes, they find in it signs of Masonic lore, they complain of the presence in it of passages from Isaiah or other portions of the Bible, and they claim that it is filled with various supposed anachronisms, or they see descriptions of incidents and characters that seem to them to describe situations or personalities in Joseph Smith's own family. Their conclusion is that the Book of Mormon—intentionally or otherwise—is not what it claims to be and is therefore fraudulent. Such critics flatly reject the Mormon account.

Though sectarian critics also see the Book of Mormon as fraudulent, they often insist in addition that it is impious or even demonic. In this way they tend toward a type of psychological variant on the Smith Theory: that Joseph Smith was influenced by demonic forces in writing the book. In the last decade in particular, a number of the most combative Protestant Evangelical critics have seen Joseph Smith's teachings and the Book of Mormon (as well as the entire Church) as the work, if not directly of Satan, at least of demonic possession. Secular critics have also used psychological explanations. In 1930, the witty Bernard DeVoto de-

nounced the Book of Mormon as “a yeasty fermentation, formless, aimless, and inconceivably absurd—at once a parody of all American religious thought and something more than a parody, a disintegration. The oestrus of a paranoiac projected it into a new Bible.”⁶ Joseph Smith has also been accused of being, among other things, dissociative, an epileptic, a parapath, a paranoid, and most recently even a bipolar manic depressive.⁷ But such speculation does not explain how he managed to dictate a coherent 175,000-word manuscript in roughly four months while troubled by such personality or behavioral disorders.

The inspired “frontier fiction” variant on the Smith Theory is the most recent. It appears to be the refuge of a few contemporary Latter-day Saints who have adopted secular, naturalistic assumptions and explanations and who therefore insist that the Book of Mormon must be a modern book, but who yet want to claim that the book has some religious value.

Critics who see the Book of Mormon as a more elaborate ruse than they believe Joseph Smith alone could have pulled off look for coconspirators who might have helped him. The usual candidate, as we shall see, is the more literate Sidney Rigdon, who is often portrayed as cleverly borrowing from an unpublished manuscript written by Solomon Spalding (so that this particular conspiracy theory is often labeled the Spalding Theory).

All four of these general theories of the authorship of the Book of Mormon have been put forward by critics at various times, with a variety of refinements. Yet there has been a clear pattern of emphasis over time. As I will demonstrate, the earliest critics assumed that Joseph Smith was perpetrating a simple fraud. It was not long, however, before the complexity of the book led Joseph’s contemporaries to conclude that Joseph himself was not sufficiently

knowledgeable or sophisticated to have produced it on his own. So critics turned to the second theory, that Joseph had help in creating this fraud—that he relied on other people and other sources. After those attempts floundered on the facts, more recent critics have returned to the idea that Joseph was the sole author—primarily to variations on the first and second categories of theories listed above, with minor efforts to promote the fourth.⁸

Initial Responses to the Book of Mormon: The Smith Theory

On 26 June 1829, some nine months before the Book of Mormon appeared in print, an anonymous writer in the *Wayne Sentinel*⁹ claimed that most of those who had heard the story of what was derisively described as Joseph Smith's "Gold Bible" felt that "the whole matter is the result of gross imposition, and a grosser superstition."¹⁰ This same author makes it clear that he is aware of the details of Joseph Smith's own version of Book of Mormon origins when he goes on to mention "the pretended discovery, through superhuman means, of an ancient record, of a religious and divine nature and origin, written in ancient characters, impossible to be interpreted by any to whom the special gift has not been imparted by inspiration."¹¹ Even before Joseph Smith had dictated to scribes the bulk of the text of the Book of Mormon, a process that took place between 7 April and early July 1829, battle lines were drawn between the account of its authorship offered by Joseph (and also in the book itself) and the accounts of those who were determined, for whatever reason, to show it fraudulent and thereby expose the young prophet as a charlatan.

Many of Joseph Smith's former neighbors, according to the earliest newspaper accounts, seem to have known and

rejected his account of the recovery of the Book of Mormon. Soon what was labeled his “imposition” was seen as the work of a juggler attempting to play tricks on the gullible. Early local newspaper reports contrasted Joseph’s account with their own conviction that the “Gold Bible” was a conscious fraud or a gross delusion grounded in superstition. It seems that the initial mention of the Book of Mormon in the contemporary press—before and immediately after it was published—told an easily recognizable version of the Mormon account, though with an incredulous tone.

“Magic,” “Money-Digging,” and the “Gold Bible”

Eventually, lurid tales of Joseph’s involvement in “magic” were brought forward, but only *after* the initial speculation about the authorship of the Book of Mormon turned out to be inadequate. Such embellishments to the Smith Theory soon became key elements in both sectarian and secular accounts of the book. And in one form or another they persist in most subsequently fashionable naturalistic explanations of the Book of Mormon.

Abner Cole published his *Palmyra Reflector* in Grandin’s print shop, which is also where the Book of Mormon was then being readied for publication. On 2, 13, and 20 January 1830 Cole included in his *Palmyra Reflector* portions of the first two chapters of 1 Nephi and also Alma 20. This violation of copyright troubled Joseph Smith. With the assistance of others, he managed to persuade Cole to cease the unauthorized printing of the Book of Mormon. The quarrel over this matter seems to have angered Cole, who had previously been rather neutral in his treatment of Joseph Smith.

A bizarre caricature of the Book of Mormon was soon published by Cole in the *Palmyra Reflector* under the title

"Book of Pukei." This parody appeared on 22 June and 7 July 1830, some three months after the publication of the Book of Mormon. Cole's spoof is significant because it is the first publication of rumors of Joseph Smith's alleged involvement in "magic" and "money digging."¹² It was the first suggestion that "the mantle of Walters the Magician had fallen"¹³ on Joseph Smith. Beginning on 6 January and ending on 19 March 1831, Cole followed his crude parody of the Book of Mormon with a series of six articles on the "Golden Bible," published under his pseudonym Obadiah Dogberry. These articles contained gossip about the alleged drawing of magic circles and additional speculation about Joseph Smith's alleged involvement in money digging.¹⁴ Later Cole asserted that, as inspiration behind a band of "money-diggers," Walters (a.k.a. Luman Walter) was the one who "first suggested to Smith the idea of finding a book."¹⁵

According to Cole, it was not an angel but the shadowy Walters (or Walter) who got young Joseph Smith started on the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon thus somehow grew out of Joseph's involvement with a band of "money diggers in the town of Manchester." According to this account, Joseph's book had its beginning in "magic" and rapacity and not, as Joseph claimed, in visits by a heavenly messenger and hence in divine revelation. Henceforth critics of the Book of Mormon tend to describe it as a strange by-product of necromancy and nefarious "treasure-digging."

Alexander Campbell, a Christian primitivist and restorationist whose efforts led to the formation of the Disciples of Christ, soon followed Cole's criticisms with a similar version of the Smith Theory. In February 1831, Campbell thought that Joseph Smith was merely another fraudulent miracle worker. He pictured the Book of Mormon as a worthless fabrication without genuine religious merit.¹⁶ "There never was," according to Campbell, "a book more evidently writ-

ten by one set of fingers, nor more certainly conceived in one cranium since the first book appeared in human language, than this same book. . . . I cannot doubt for a single moment that he is the sole author and proprietor of it.”¹⁷ “It is as certainly Smith’s fabrication as Satan is the father of lies.”¹⁸

Campbell’s denunciation of the Book of Mormon contained a bold, unsubstantiated claim that has been taken as simply true by numerous subsequent critics. At the end of his work, he declared that one could find in the Book of Mormon “every error and almost every truth discussed in N[ew] York in the last ten years.”¹⁹ Beginning at least in 1945, this claim has been repeated by critics who hold that Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon; it has thereby provided a major premise for recent secular, naturalistic explanations of the teachings found in the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith was, it is claimed, merely offering opinions that he had somehow absorbed from his environment. It is assumed Joseph worked his opinions on contemporary sectarian controversies into a narrative that he pretended was authentically ancient.

Though Campbell read and summarized portions of the Book of Mormon, which is more than many or even most critics have done, he discounted its complexity and maze of characters. He was also highly critical of its teachings, which did not seem to him to have much in common with the New Testament. Evidently, his predisposition to debunk the book blinded him to the numerous internal evidences of authenticity that have been identified by twentieth-century scholars.

Part of Eber Howe’s strategy in 1834, in a work entitled *Mormonism Unveiled*, was similar: build on the earlier attacks on Joseph Smith by stressing and bolstering speculation about Joseph’s superstition and alleged involvement in such things as magic and money digging.²⁰ The bulk of Howe’s

book consists of embellishments of earlier allegations concerning the young Joseph Smith. But instead of offering unsupported assertions, as did Cole, Howe fleshed out and seemingly supported Cole's gossip with affidavits that carried the names of those presumably familiar with Joseph Smith or who were willing to repeat the tales circulating about him in the Palmyra area. Even if one assumes that there are here and there some grains of truth in the gossip these statements contain, they clearly do not explain the Book of Mormon, nor can a coherent account of Joseph Smith's early activities be fashioned from them. And yet the controversial affidavits published in *Mormonism Unveiled* provide the foundation for many subsequent efforts to discredit Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon.

Howe published affidavits assembled by one Philastus Hurlbut, who had been excommunicated by the Saints in June 1833. After his expulsion, Hurlbut busied himself fashioning or finding "evidence" of Joseph Smith's youthful wrongdoing and dissolute character. But the gossip about the presumed activities of the young Joseph Smith published in Howe's book yield a portrait of someone incapable of the intellectual effort necessary to produce a long, complicated history like the Book of Mormon. Hence, even though much of *Mormonism Unveiled* might be read as supporting an enriched version of the Smith Theory, and has been made to do that by others,²¹ it is difficult to imagine that the Joseph Smith that emerges from Howe's book could have, without help, written the Book of Mormon.

Those who, like Campbell, initially advanced the Smith Theory did not attempt to account for the manner in which Joseph Smith in a very short time, at a young age, with very little formal education and even less experience, could possibly have composed and dictated to scribes what turned out to be 590 pages of published text. It is one thing to tell an

exotic, even enthralling story; it is, however, quite another thing to produce a long, complicated book, then to make the metal plates containing this ancient record available for witnesses to inspect. Joseph Smith published a sober, complex book giving at least the appearance of being a history of an ancient covenant people of God. Joseph Smith's "Gold Bible" contained a sizable cast of characters and an intricate narrative into which is woven subtle and coherent prophetic teachings. Furthermore, it was not a charming magician but the Book of Mormon that attracted the loyalty and grounded the faith of the earliest Saints. Critics were thus confronted with the task of explaining a large, complex book, the testimony of witnesses to the plates, and a growing number of people attracted by the fledgling Church of Christ that grew up around the Book of Mormon. As Hugh Nibley and Richard Bushman²² have shown, whatever else might be said about the theory that Joseph Smith, given his youth and lack of education, was the sole author, this explanation clearly leaves far too much unexplained. Hence, critics were forced to fashion a more plausible explanation of the authorship of the Book of Mormon.

The Work of Conspirators: The Spalding Theory

What other possible explanation could there be of who wrote the Book of Mormon? Beginning in 1834 and in response to the collapse of the Smith Theory, critics began to suggest and then eventually insist that Joseph Smith was not its sole author. Someone, it was argued, must have been involved with Joseph in a conspiracy to foist fraudulent fiction on the gullible. In 1945 Fawn Brodie noted that the portrait of Joseph Smith fashioned by those who claimed to know him well was such that "detractors of the Mormons within a few years declared that the Book of Mormon must

have been written by someone else, and [they] eventually laid the mantle of authorship upon one of Joseph's converts, Sidney Rigdon, a Campbellite preacher from Ohio."²³

The Spalding Theory first appeared in Eber Howe's work in 1834. This explanation of the Book of Mormon rests on tales reported to Hurlbut (and published by Howe) concerning an unpublished romance about pre-Columbian Americans written in 1812 by Solomon Spalding, a disaffected Congregational minister who died in 1816. Hurlbut collected affidavits in which the residents of New Salem (Conneaut), Ohio, claimed that some twenty years earlier they had heard Spalding read his unpublished novel and they could now recall that it was remarkably similar to narrative portions of the Book of Mormon, and that many of the names in the Book of Mormon were also taken from Spalding's novel. Again on the basis of Hurlbut's affidavits, Howe argued that the Book of Mormon could or perhaps might have been taken from Spalding's manuscript as part of a conspiracy between Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith.

In an effort to locate this presumed source for the names and narrative portions of the Book of Mormon, Hurlbut tracked down Spalding's widow and located a trunk in which he found the manuscript for Spalding's romance. But this manuscript turned out to be quite unlike the Book of Mormon and was suppressed by Howe, only to surface many years later, much to the delight of Latter-day Saints.²⁴

The Spalding Theory was fraught with difficulties from the beginning. That did not, however, prevent one version or another of the theory from being the standard non-Mormon explanation of the Book of Mormon until 1945.²⁵ The Spalding Theory was adopted uncritically in encyclopedias and other reference works worldwide, where it has continued to have a life of its own, untroubled by repeated refutations. The Spalding Theory went essentially unchal-

lenged among gentile critics from 1834 until Isaac Woodbridge Riley questioned it in 1902.²⁶ But William Alexander Linn, also in 1902 in an influential anti-Mormon book, adopted the Spalding Theory,²⁷ and as late as 1932, George Arbaugh even attempted to identify portions of the Book of Mormon that had been lifted by Rigdon from a supposed second novel by Spalding.²⁸

In the last half-century, the Spalding Theory has fallen into disfavor among the secular and more competent sectarian critics, though it has continued to be popular among some anti-Mormon zealots.²⁹ One writer credits Brodie with having dealt the Spalding Theory “a crushing blow by casting suspicion on the validity of testimony given years afterward by witnesses whose statements seem too much alike to be trustworthy.”³⁰ Latter-day Saints had been making essentially the same arguments about the Spalding Theory for over a century, but they had not managed to persuade gentile critics, who seem to have responded to Brodie because she appeared to them to be unbiased and also because she had provided an engaging account of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon in which she advanced a version of the original Smith Theory. It should be noted, however, that essentially the same criticisms she directed at Hurlbut’s attempt to link Spalding’s romance to the Book of Mormon could (and should) have been made against the “evidence” collected or fabricated by Hurlbut concerning Joseph’s early involvement in “magic” and “money-digging.”

The Smith Theory Refurbished: Fawn Brodie

In 1945 Fawn Brodie returned to the Smith Theory in her account of the origins of the Book of Mormon. In the supplement to the revised and enlarged edition of *No Man Knows My History*, Brodie describes her belief “that Joseph

Smith's assumption of the role of a religious prophet was an evolutionary process, that he began as a bucolic scryer, using the primitive techniques of the folklore of magic common to his area, most of which he discarded as he evolved into a preacher-prophet."³¹ For Brodie, Joseph Smith was the sole author of the Book of Mormon. She grounded her explanation on the tales told about Joseph Smith by Abner Cole and the affidavits collected by Hurlbut and published by Howe.

Built on such materials, Brodie's explanation of the Book of Mormon was that Joseph Smith began as a shiftless, lazy young village magician who spent his time searching for buried treasure with a seer stone.³² How did he manage to become the prophet of what many came to believe was a restoration of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Her explanation is that, as a by-product of his early activities as a village scryer and his related money-digging ventures, Joseph somehow turned to writing a tale about the ancient people who constructed the mounds that dotted the landscape of Western New York. Brodie thus assumed that the Book of Mormon was initially conceived by Joseph as a scam—what she called "a mere money-making history of the Indians."³³ It started out as a history of the Mound Builders and only later evolved into a religious history, as Joseph somehow began to assume the role of prophet. At some point—perhaps after he had produced 116 pages of text, which were then "conveniently" lost—Joseph presumably added the religious elements to what Brodie describes as his "frontier fiction." At that point he got into the "prophet business."

In considering the soundness of Brodie's account, it should be remembered that her training was in English literature and not history; she actually began with an urge "to write fiction."³⁴ And she "started out *not* to write a biography of Joseph Smith but to write a short article on the

sources of the Book of Mormon."³⁵ Those sources were all to be found in Joseph Smith's environment. Her efforts to uncover the sources presumably used by Joseph Smith in composing the Book of Mormon eventually turned her endeavor into an artfully contrived biography. It was her obvious literary gifts, rather than her historical scholarship, that established her reputation as an authority on Mormon things and as a biographer.

Hugh Nibley once described *No Man Knows My History* as a "much-heralded novel,"³⁶ while Sterling McMurrin, who was highly sympathetic with Brodie's treatment of Joseph Smith, granted that it was her "strong bent toward psychobiography" that made her five biographies interesting reading, "and at the same time occasioned much of the more competent criticism which her books generated."³⁷ And Vardis Fisher, who was also generally supportive of her treatment of Joseph Smith, saw it as "almost more of a novel than a biography because she rarely hesitates to give the content of a mind or to explain motives which at best can only be surmised."³⁸ It was exactly this feature of her account of Joseph Smith that helped establish her reputation, if not as a psychohistorian, at least as controversial psychobiographer. She admitted, however, that *No Man Knows My History* was only inadvertently a psychobiography, for when she wrote it she had neither competence nor experience in psychological or psychoanalytical matters.³⁹

Joseph Smith was able to produce the Book of Mormon, according to Brodie, by simply drawing upon the King James Version of the Bible, Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews*,⁴⁰ and the lore available in his immediate environment—"the impassioned revivalist sermons, the popular fallacies about Indian origin, and the current political crusades."⁴¹ Here she claims that she "was able to find the sources of Joseph Smith's ideas, particularly the ideas which went into the writing of

the Book of Mormon."⁴² And in looking for the sources she thought Joseph Smith had used she believed that she had actually been

able to read the newspapers he had read as a young man. This turned out to be an absolute gold mine! A lot of the theories about the American Indians being descendants of the Lost Ten Tribes and the descriptions of what were being found in the Indian mounds were in the newspapers. The speculation was there. That was extremely important as was the anti-Masonic speculation.⁴³

Such sources might account for how Joseph produced a complex book so beyond his own knowledge. She was confident that "painstaking research can uncover the sources of all its ideas."⁴⁴ Her conviction that careful research should yield all the sources that Joseph employed in writing the Book of Mormon has set the agenda for much of the post-Brodie efforts to supplement her own flawed account and thereby bolster a version of the earlier Smith Theory.⁴⁵

The most serious problem in Brodie's account of the authorship of the Book of Mormon is not her facile linkage of speculations about the Mound Builders and the Lost Tribes of Israel to the Book of Mormon, or her confidence that Joseph depended upon Ethan Smith's book, and so forth, but her uncritical reliance upon Hurlbut's affidavits, for if one believes the affidavits, one could hardly believe Joseph Smith capable of fashioning a large, complex book, and especially one with a sober prophetic message. Furthermore, her notion that Joseph Smith started out intentionally fabricating the Book of Mormon, and only later came to more or less believe his own pretensions, is far-fetched, whatever one makes of the charming way in which she tells her story.

Since Brodie started with the assumption that Joseph Smith knew exactly what he was doing when he wrote the Book of Mormon, she was initially flatly opposed to any

explanation that made him out to be anything but an intentional fraud. But by 1971 Brodie had shifted somewhat away from this earlier stance toward a psychological theory. She began to argue that the Book of Mormon was a kind of unconscious therapy for Joseph's supposedly deeply conflicted personality. The book, she asserted, evolved in time into an unconscious expression of conflict within his own family. However, she continued to maintain that Joseph started out knowingly fabricating a fraudulent Book of Mormon, and only later became a dupe of his own scam—he came more or less to believe the story he told and the book he had authored. Thus he took on the role of prophet and became the founder of what Brodie called a “new religious tradition.”⁴⁶

Deep in the Psyche . . .

In the 1971 revision of her book, Brodie argued that “the plot for the Book of Mormon was . . . constructed in Joseph Smith's fantasies.”⁴⁷ Her 1971 explanation turns the Book of Mormon into an autobiographical psychodrama or what she considered a literary fantasy in which Joseph more or less covertly told his and his family's story. In whatever version Brodie offered, the Book of Mormon is read as a modern book and hence as entirely fraudulent.

Brodie fashioned her account of the Book of Mormon under the influence of Dale L. Morgan, another Latter-day Saint dissident. Morgan was convinced that, whatever else might be said about him, Joseph Smith was a conscious fraud. Morgan and Brodie were highly critical of those who saw signs of simple illusion or even delusion in Joseph Smith. Hence they both rejected Bernard DeVoto's effort to depict Joseph Smith as an epileptic or any other effort to explain the Book of Mormon as the product of abnormal

psychology.⁴⁸ But by the time Brodie revised her book, she had drifted away from her earlier heavy dependence upon Morgan. She claimed that “fifteen or twenty years later” she had read some psychiatric literature, one item of which she included in her revised account of Joseph Smith.

By 1971, Brodie was willing to draw explicitly, though quite tentatively, on psychological explanations of both the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith.⁴⁹ She claimed that Joseph Smith suffered from a severe identity problem—specifically what Phyllis Greenacre and others have described as a need to perform for an audience in the role of “impostor.”⁵⁰ Where others merely engaged in gold digging, Joseph fabricated a gold Bible. Hence Joseph’s problem was *pseudologia fantastica*; he was driven to establish his identity by satisfying an audience that demanded that he play a role. They wanted a prophet, and he filled their need.

Clearly this explanation hardly provides a more generous estimate of Joseph’s personality than that previously offered by DeVoto.⁵¹ But Brodie still “deliberately avoided clinical labels in describing the inner character of Joseph Smith.”⁵² Why? It was at least partly because being an “impostor” was not, she felt, “the decisive key” to his personality. Still, she insisted that Greenacre’s impostor theory could be adapted better as an explanation of Joseph Smith’s psyche than DeVoto’s “paranoid” or Kimball Young’s “parapath” explanations. She also admitted “that her considerable discussion of this problem with several psychoanalysts has served to underline . . . the difficulties of clinical diagnosis of a man long since dead.”⁵³

. . . And in Deep Trouble

When initially published in 1945, Brodie’s biography of Joseph Smith received instant acclaim at the hands of nu-

merous admiring reviewers. For example, Dale Morgan, who had provided her with extensive assistance in writing *No Man Knows My History*, lavished praise on her book.⁵⁴ It soon became the standard secular explanation of the Book of Mormon. Virtually all of the critics of the Book of Mormon have returned to the original gentile explanation and pictured Joseph Smith, and not someone else, as its author. Hence, once again versions of the original Smith Theory constitute the dominant mode of explanation employed by those who reject the possibility that the book is an authentic ancient text written and edited by Mormon. In explaining the Book of Mormon, the gentile critics have returned to where they started in 1831 when Alexander Campbell published his *Delusions*.

Brodie's reputation, especially for having provided the best naturalistic account of Mormon origins, went mostly unchallenged in the larger academic world until she wrote a highly controversial biography of Thomas Jefferson. Then her reputation plummeted—a torrent of criticism was directed at both her methods and her findings, which to that point had only been examined and challenged by Latter-day Saints.⁵⁵

As Hugh Nibley has pointed out, "hardly a single new argument against the Book of Mormon has come forth since the first decades of its appearance."⁵⁶ Certainly no new explanations of its authorship have turned up. In 1959 Nibley thought that "at the moment the critics are right back where they started from 130 years ago."⁵⁷ They seem to have come full circle. When the Book of Mormon was first published, Alexander Campbell and a few others thought that Joseph Smith was its author, but that explanation soon collapsed and was eventually replaced by the theory that somehow involved Spalding's novel and made Sidney Rigdon the author of the Book of Mormon. One version or another of this

explanation constituted the received opinion among critics for the next century.

In his 1959 survey of arguments against the Book of Mormon, Nibley pointed out that

the critics have no choice today but to go back to the old original theory of Campbell. But if that theory was so readily discredited (please note: it was *not* supplanted by the Spaulding theory but broke down on its own accord, and the Spaulding substitute was only found after a desperate interval of frantic searching), if it could not stand up for a year on its own merits, why should it work now?⁵⁸

Critics now rather conveniently forget that the Saints and most of their earliest critics agreed—but for quite different reasons—that Joseph Smith was simply incapable of writing the Book of Mormon. Nibley’s explanation for the current fondness of the critics for the Smith Theory is

that lots of things are forgotten in 125 years! The theory that Joseph Smith composed the Book of Mormon raises questions and involves corollaries which a hundred years ago were readily seen to present an insuperable obstacle to its acceptance. But the modern world can very easily overlook those questions and corollaries, and present-day critics are trying hard to do so.⁵⁹

Cultural Mormons Confront the Book of Mormon

When Brodie published *No Man Knows My History*, the Saints read her book as a betrayal of the faith by someone with roots in the Mormon community.⁶⁰ Since then the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith have received substantial treatments by Latter-day Saints able to challenge and supplant her naturalistic account and to call into question the background assumptions upon which it was grounded. For ex-

ample, soon after Brodie's book was published, Nibley began in a series of essays to stress the subtle complexities he found in the Book of Mormon, complexities that seem beyond the capacities of anyone in America at the time the book was published. In addition, he supplied numerous reasons to support the belief that the Book of Mormon was an authentic ancient history,⁶¹ virtually all of which were previously unnoticed by critics and the faithful alike. The body of such evidence, uncovered by Nibley and a number of other Latter-day Saint scholars, continues to grow.

But not all Latter-day Saints have been pleased with efforts to read the Book of Mormon as an authentic ancient text. And some have not given sufficiently close attention to this growing body of studies supporting the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Since Brodie showed the way, it has become increasingly fashionable for cultural Mormons (those whose connections to the Mormon community are more a matter of cultural identity than of faith and practice) to reject the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon and to proclaim publicly their disbelief in the Book of Mormon. A striking example came in 1984, when Sterling M. McMurrin, who early in his career was a teacher in the Church Educational System, confessed that he had come

to the conclusion at a very early age, earlier than I can remember, that you don't get books from angels and translate them by miracles; it is just that simple. So I simply don't believe the Book of Mormon to be authentic. I think that all the hassling over the authenticity of the Book of Mormon is just a waste of time. You should understand that I don't mean to say that there aren't some interesting and worthwhile things in the Book of Mormon. I don't mean to attack the Book of Mormon but rather to simply deny its authenticity. I don't believe that it is what the Church teaches it to be.⁶²

And yet McMurrin, quite unlike Brodie, believed there were “some interesting and worthwhile things in the Book of Mormon”—though not, of course, authentic ancient history or the word of God. For McMurrin the Book of Mormon was strictly a human manufacture, and neither prophetic nor otherwise normative, since he rejected as a manifestation of sheer irrationalism the possibility of divine special revelations as understood by Latter-day Saints.⁶³ From his secular perspective, for the Saints to consider the Book of Mormon a genuine revelation from God is absolute folly. His youthful confidence on this point may explain why he never read the Book of Mormon.⁶⁴

Following publication of *No Man Knows My History*, a few Mormon historians began advancing cautiously worded naturalistic interpretations of the Book of Mormon.⁶⁵ Marvin Hill has indicated that he thinks Brodie’s original thesis

opens considerable room for speculation because its either-or alternatives were precisely the same as those of the early Mormon apologist and missionary, Orson Pratt, presented to his potential converts in the 1840s and 1850s. But between Pratt and Brodie a hundred years of Mormon experience have intervened. Whereas Pratt affirmed that with Smith’s accomplishments he must have been a true prophet, Brodie, looking at the man’s limitations, concluded he was a fraud. Possibly now historians should begin to explore the broad, promising middle ground which neither Pratt nor Brodie fully perceived.⁶⁶

What might constitute such a middle ground between prophet and fraud? Hill simply claims that Joseph Smith was sincere in his illusions or delusions. What impact would such reasoning have when applied to the Book of Mormon? Hill does not address the concern of most Latter-day Saints that this “middle ground” amounts to a flat rejection of the Book of Mormon, just as much as the more vicious attacks of his predecessors.

Writers like Hill are rarely willing to become involved in public debate on these issues. They seem concerned to retain their identity as members of the Church. They tend to argue that portions of the book may still be somehow inspiring or even “inspired,” even when the book is read as a “recent composition” or as Joseph Smith’s fiction. Others who do not care about their standing in the Church openly assert that its having been written by Joseph Smith makes it and him into something fraudulent.

More recently, critics from within the Church have published forthright and unambiguous denials that the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient text.⁶⁷ For example, in 1983 Tony Hutchinson declared that Joseph Smith had not restored authentic ancient texts; yet the texts he wrote still have some religious value.⁶⁸ Hutchinson has since become a mouthpiece for those who want to argue that the Book of Mormon was written by Joseph Smith—that it is fiction that is yet somehow either inspiring or perhaps “inspired.”⁶⁹

This is not a very stable position. Many of those on the fringes of the Mormon community who at first toy with the notion that the Book of Mormon is fiction and yet, in some previously not understood way, “inspired” eventually come to reject the Book of Mormon altogether by seeing fraud in it and in Joseph Smith, even though they may be willing to grant that some portions of the book are interesting and perhaps even true. Hutchinson’s account is also unstable in the sense that it is unlikely to function as a ground for or explanation of the faith of Latter-day Saints. In addition, those who are inclined to advance such an opinion must find ways of protecting their position from the more radical stance taken by those who insist that Joseph Smith fabricated “frontier fiction,” parts of which might be inspiring—which is quite a different notion from holding that God is the ultimate author of a fictional Book of Mormon.

These Latter-day Saint writers who unambiguously deny that the Book of Mormon is an ancient text may retain some ties to the Church, but henceforth they boldly proclaim that they will determine the content of Latter-day Saint faith. For example, Edwin Firmage Jr. describes his “anti-conversion”: he insists that the Book of Mormon and book of Abraham are fiction and not fact.⁷⁰ He concedes that for him “many questions remain” and that he still has some questions that even he “can’t answer.” For instance, if “Joseph Smith is the author of the Book of Mormon, is he then a fraud, or is the Book of Mormon the result of revelatory experience?”⁷¹ He adds a comforting note: “At present, I have no compelling answer and am willing to entertain either possibility. Either way,” he acknowledges, “there are serious implications for my faith.”⁷²

Firmage ends with a homily about how “freedom to choose can be a frightening thing because it means that we are individually responsible for what we do.” Hardly a novel idea. But he then celebrates “a chastened belief which recognizes that certainty will always elude us, and that is a part of life. We choose to believe, but we cannot know for sure what the end of our faith will be.” He claims that “the proper response to constant change is not to abandon religion altogether, but constantly redefine what faith means. This defining process necessarily leads to different results for everyone.”⁷³ Unfortunately, Firmage has overlooked the fact that faith is a community matter and possession, not merely a private good and not a mere whim—that faith is not something one constantly refashions to suit the current flux of fads and fashions.

New Reproaches on the Book of Mormon

Thus the most significant post-Brodie assaults on the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon have not been

fashioned by Protestant preachers or by gentiles who find the restoration outlandish. Instead, dissident, disgruntled, or former Latter-day Saints have fired most of the rounds in the latest assault on the Book of Mormon. The most recent attack is found in a collection of essays published by Signature Books, entitled *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*.⁷⁴

New Approaches is an effort to persuade the Saints to abandon the claim that the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient history and to recognize that Joseph Smith was its author. One of its contributors, David P. Wright, grants that “some might think that acceptance of the conclusion that Joseph Smith is the author of the Book of Mormon requires rejecting the work as religiously relevant and significant.”⁷⁵ But, he insists, “such a rejection does not follow from this critical judgment.” His justification for this assertion is that one must distinguish the spiritual value of a text from the question of who wrote it. Then, without supporting this assertion, he shifts to arguing that the Saints ought not to retain “a traditional viewpoint which requires that scripture, to be scripture, be miraculous, free (or mostly free) from error, and God’s own word rather than humans’ words about God.”⁷⁶ What Wright seems to be saying is that Latter-day Saints ought to read the Book of Mormon in the same way liberal biblical critics currently read the Bible. These scholars tend to deny that the miracles recorded in the Bible actually took place, but by adopting sophisticated theories of myth they are still able to find some “spiritual value in the Bible.”

But it is Tony Hutchinson, more than any of the other authors whose essays appear in *New Approaches*, who attempts to salvage something from the wreckage done by this concentrated assault on the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon.⁷⁷ David P. Wright merely asserts that for him Joseph Smith “is as interesting and religiously relevant when

understood to be the author of the Book of Mormon as when he is considered the translator.”⁷⁸ Such opinions, which are not entirely unlike the sentiments articulated in Sterling McMurrin’s remarkable dogmatism about the Book of Mormon, are found throughout *New Approaches*. Only a few of the authors—Hutchinson, Wright and perhaps Mark Thomas—seem to have any appreciation for the teachings in the Book of Mormon.

Essays written by Dan Vogel, Ed Ashment, Brent Metcalfe, and Stan Larson betray little if any sympathy for the teachings of the Book of Mormon. The essays by Melodie Charles, John Kunich, and Deanne Matheny are such that it is difficult to tell what they really think about the truth claims of the Book of Mormon. But Hutchinson argues that the Book of Mormon has some relationship to God, even though Joseph Smith is its author and it is therefore strictly fiction. Much like David P. Wright, Hutchinson claims that, for him, it is of religious significance. Hutchinson and Wright, however, face the double task of (1) convincing faithful Latter-day Saints of the wisdom of seeing the Book of Mormon as fiction, and (2) showing exactly why those who agree with them in holding that the Book of Mormon is fiction have gotten it wrong when they claim that Joseph Smith’s imaginative work is also a fraud.

A Possible “Middle Ground”?

Some gentle historians now complain that believing Latter-day Saints show no interest in finding a compromise over the Book of Mormon. Seemingly anxious “to understand Mormonism as part of American religious experience,” these critics complain that most Latter-day Saint scholars “typically reject compromises, such as the view that a mythical Book of Mormon can evince religious authenticity

as ‘inspired redaction.’ Everything in the Book of Mormon, they say, must be accepted as historical fact.”⁷⁹ This way of formulating the issue gets it wrong. Hardly anyone argues that “everything” in the Book of Mormon is historical. The need is to make a distinction between what, for example, Lehi taught, which may or may not be “historical,” and the idea of there actually having been a Lehi who taught those things. The historical issue is whether there was a Lehi.

Lawrence Foster, one contemporary gentile critic who rejects the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon, claims that critics like himself offer to give up charging Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon with fraud, if believing Latter-day Saints, that is “Traditionalists,” will “meet them half-way.”⁸⁰ Foster complains that his naturalistic explanation of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s prophetic truth claims is “simply not appealing to ‘true believer’ Mormon traditionalists.”⁸¹ Foster insists:

If any real engagement is to be possible between the so-called “traditionalists” and the so-called “new Mormon historians,” then the traditionalists will have to be willing to reach out when we attempt to meet them halfway, as we have done so frequently in the past with little or no response except vituperation against us on their part.⁸²

What writers like Hill, Foster, and other recent critics either do not see or are unwilling to acknowledge seems obvious to most Latter-day Saints. One reason for rejecting the proposed “middle-ground” compromises over the question of the authorship of the Book of Mormon is that this ancient scripture, more than anything else, is what keeps the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from becoming just another Protestant sect or social welfare agency. In addition, the Book of Mormon was what witnessed to those who first became members of the fledgling Church of Christ

that Joseph Smith wore the mantle of a genuine prophet, just as it does today to those who are believing Latter-day Saints. And finally the existence of the Book of Mormon has, more than any other single thing, right from the beginning, distinguished the Latter-day Saints from various brands of sectarian religiosity.⁸³ It is hard to imagine how all this could be given up without dire consequences for the covenant people of God.

Conclusion

The debate generated by critics over the authorship of the Book of Mormon has yielded two broad types of explanations, each with a wide variety of refinements and embellishments. For over a century the most popular conspiracy explanation was some form of the Rigdon-Spalding Theory. But Brodie seems to have demolished that explanation. With the collapse of conspiracy explanations like the Spalding Theory, and in their efforts to counter the Mormon explanation, critics have been forced to revive some version of the original Smith Theory. Brodie herself turned to a version of the Smith Theory. But her version of that explanation has also turned out to be problematic and eventually led to other versions of the Smith Theory that take much more seriously the actual religious content of the Book of Mormon.

The post-Brodie versions of the Smith Theory, which may or may not include a psychological explanation of Joseph Smith, tend to be much less hostile to Joseph Smith and also much more inclined to grant the complexity and sophistication that is present in the Book of Mormon. And critics, as we have seen, have also been much more willing to see Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims as genuine expressions of religiosity. Some of the language in essays by

Jan Shipps⁸⁴ and even Harold Bloom⁸⁵ have shown this to be true.

What may stand behind the shifts in the way the Smith Theory has been set forth since Fawn Brodie revived it in 1945 is the difficulty faced by critics of gaining the attention of either the Saints or the larger public with crude attacks on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. Instead, the most recent critics of the Book of Mormon have tended to adopt a much less vindictive posture. When the Book of Mormon is confronted, it is no longer brushed aside as “a yeasty fermentation, formless, aimless, and inconceivably absurd.”⁸⁶

Critics of the Book of Mormon now seem forced to follow the agenda set out by Brodie—they must locate nineteenth-century sources for all its contents. And they must explain how Joseph Smith was able to locate, digest, winnow, and then fashion these materials into a coherent form. In addition, they must make some judgment on whether he knew what he was doing. If his efforts were conscious, then the critics must insist that his endeavor was in some sense fraudulent. It appears that the only way for critics to avoid charging Joseph Smith with fraud is to treat him as in some sense dissociative. The most common way of working around these difficulties has been for critics to transform Joseph Smith into a genius—one with a profound religious imagination and so forth. But by doing this, the critics get ever closer to granting that he was a prophet and that the Book of Mormon is simply true.

Why have critics become more respectful and less critical of both the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith? For one thing, they are confronted by an outpouring of works by faithful Latter-day Saint scholars that explicate the teachings of the Book of Mormon and defend its historical authenticity. They also face the refutation of most of the older criticisms of the historical authenticity of the Book of

Mormon and also of its prophetic teachings. And they face sophisticated exploration of many features of the text that make sense only if the Book of Mormon is a genuine ancient text.

Notes

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1. Jan Shipps, "An Inside-Outsider in Zion," *Dialogue* 15/3 (1982): 154. Shipps is currently the most conspicuous non-Mormon student of Mormon things.

2. For a similar gentile assessment, see Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 27.

3. Book of Mormon title page. Joseph Smith appears to have said little concerning the exact process by which he was able to dictate to scribes the English text of the Book of Mormon other than that he did it with the help of the Lord.

4. Others have used a similar label to describe the view that Joseph Smith was the author of the Book of Mormon. See, for example, Marvin S. Hill, "The Historiography of Mormonism," *Church History* 28/4 (December 1959): 418–9, who refers to the "Smith hypothesis."

5. Jan Shipps, "The Mormons: Looking Forward and Outward," in *Where the Spirit Leads: American Denominations Today*, ed. Martin E. Marty (Richmond, Va.: John Knox, 1980), 29–30.

6. Bernard DeVoto, "The Centennial of Mormonism," *American Mercury* 19/5 (January 1930): 5.

7. On the last description, see Lawrence Foster, "The Psychology of Religious Genius: Joseph Smith and the Origins of New Religious Movements," *Dialogue* 26/4 (1993): 1–22.

8. The most intensive examination of the logic of the various

and often competing or contradictory arguments against the Book of Mormon has been provided by Hugh W. Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 3–15, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989), 127–206, and *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 53–101. The most thorough, even-handed assessment of this literature has been provided by Richard L. Bushman in *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 115–42. See also Francis W. Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America: The Book of Mormon*, vol. 2, *Attempts to Prove the Book of Mormon Man-Made* (Independence, Mo: Zion's Publishing, 1959).

9. Published in Palmyra in Egbert B. Grandin's print shop.

10. Quoted in Kirkham, *New Witness*, 2:28.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*, 51–4.

13. *Ibid.*, 53.

14. At least this much is clear from both Mormon and non-Mormon sources: with his father, Joseph Smith was employed by Josiah Stowell in Pennsylvania in mining operations, that is, in a search for a lost Spanish mine, or in what was derisively called "money digging" by his detractors. And Joseph apparently employed a seer stone early on for these and perhaps other purposes. For a responsible survey of the rumors about "money-digging" (or "treasure-hunting"), see Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 69–76, 78, 83, 93, 97, 103, 128, 167, 161–2, 184, 192, 211–4, 216.

15. See Kirkham, *New Witness*, 2:74. "Walters the Magician" (Kirkham, *New Witness*, 2:52–3) seems to have been a real person who might have frequented the Palmyra area. See Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 120–7, for a competent treatment of this issue. For bizarre speculation about Luman Walter (or Walters), see D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), 82–4, 89–97.

16. Alexander Campbell, *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon; with an Examination of Its Internal and External Evidences*,

and a Refutation of Its Pretenses to Divine Authority (Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1832), reprinted from "Delusions," *Millennial Harbinger* 2/2 (7 February 1831): 85–96. *Delusions* can also be found in the *Painesville Telegraph*, 15 March 1931, and it is partly reproduced in Kirkham, *New Witness*, 2:102–9.

17. Campbell, *Delusions*, 13.

18. *Ibid.* Ironically, Campbell later abandoned his initial claim that Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon, when he came to endorse the notion that it was Sidney Rigdon who fashioned the Book of Mormon from an unpublished novel by Solomon Spalding (see Campbell, "The Mormon Bible," *Millennial Harbinger*, 3/6 [June 1839]: 267–68; see also Campbell's review of Eber D. Howe's *Mormonism Unveiled* in "Mormonism Unveiled," *Millennial Harbinger* 6/1 [January 1835]: 44–5).

19. Campbell, *Delusions*, 13.

20. See Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled, or, A Faithful Account of That Singular Imposition and Delusion, from Its Rise to the Present Time: with Sketches of the Characters of Its Propagators, and a Full Detail of the Manner in Which the Famous Gold Bible Was Brought before the World, to Which Are Added, Inquiries into the Probability that the Historical Part of the Said Bible Was Written by One Solomon Spalding, More Than Twenty Years Ago, and by Him Intended to Have Been Published as a Romance* (Painesville, Ohio: printed and published by the author, 1834).

21. For example, in 1945 Fawn M. Brodie built her account (see Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed., rev. and enl. [New York: Vintage, 1995]) on the affidavits previously published by Howe in 1834.

22. See Nibley, *Prophetic Book*, 127–206, and Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 115–42.

23. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 68.

24. See Lester E. Bush Jr., "The Spaulding Theory Then and Now," *Dialogue* 10/4 (1977): 40–69.

25. For example, one difficulty in the Spalding Theory is that Rigdon joined the Church and met Joseph Smith after the Book of Mormon was in print. Hence it was necessary to invent earlier

secret meetings between Rigdon and Smith to make the Spalding Theory even remotely plausible.

26. See I. Woodbridge Riley, *The Founder of Mormonism: A Psychological Study of Joseph Smith, Jr.* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1902), 369–95. Joseph Smith, from Riley’s perspective, was epileptic, and Riley assumed that this explained how the Book of Mormon had been written by Joseph. Riley thus provided, following the intellectual fashions of his time, what was perhaps the first effort at a psychological explanation of Joseph Smith, if we discount some brief remarks by T. B. H. Stenhouse in his *The Rocky Mountain Saints* (New York: D. Appleton, 1873), 546–7, 551–2.

27. See William Alexander Linn, *Story of the Mormons from the Date of their Origin to the Year 1901* (New York: Macmillan, 1902; reprint, New York: Russell & Russell, 1963).

28. See George B. Arbaugh, *Revelation in Mormonism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1932).

29. For a summary of much of the debate over and eventual collapse of Spalding hypothesis, see Bush, “Spaulding Theory,” 40–69.

30. Hill, “Historiography,” 420.

31. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 405. Thomas F. O’Dea followed Brodie’s line of argument, but the version of the argument he adopted is superior to hers primarily because he read the Book of Mormon more carefully (see O’Dea, *The Mormons* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957], 2–40). O’Dea’s approach has been examined by Hugh Nibley (see Nibley, *Prophetic Book*, 185–88). In a subtle and important essay, Richard L. Bushman has refuted a crucial portion of O’Dea’s argument (see Bushman, “The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution,” *BYU Studies* 17/1 [1976]: 3–20).

32. See Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 405.

33. *Ibid.*, 83.

34. Fawn M. Brodie, “Fawn McKay Brodie: An Oral Interview,” interview by Shirley E. Stephenson, *Dialogue* 14/2 (1981): 104 (hereafter cited as “An Oral Interview”).

35. *Ibid.*

36. Nibley, *Prophetic Book*, 141.

37. Sterling M. McMurrin, "A New Climate of Liberation: A Tribute to Fawn McKay Brodie, 1915–1981," *Dialogue* 14/1 (1981): 74.

38. Vardis Fisher, "Mormonism and Its Yankee Prophet," *New York Times Book Reviews*, 25 November 1945, p. 1. Fisher was the author of a popular novel entitled *Children of God: An American Epic* (New York: Harper, 1939).

39. See Brodie, "An Oral Interview," 104.

40. See Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 46. John W. Welch has carefully examined the possible links between Ethan Smith's book and the Book of Mormon in his "View of the Hebrews: 'An Unparalleled,'" in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books and FARMS, 1992), 83–7.

41. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 69.

42. Brodie, "An Oral Interview," 103.

43. *Ibid.* Is there a reason to believe that Joseph Smith read newspapers before the publication of the Book of Mormon? And what exactly does speculation about Mound Builders have to do with the Book of Mormon, which does not refer to anything like the local mounds that were generating attention. And clearly speculation about the lost tribes of Israel is not part of the Book of Mormon. Mistakes like these point again to her lack of serious attention to the actual text she purports to explain to the world.

44. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 67. For a recent attempt to locate the literary sources for Joseph Smith's ideas, see Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe, "Joseph Smith's Scriptural Cosmology," in *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 187–219. See also Dan Vogel, *Indian Origins of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986); Vogel, "Mormonism's 'Anti-Masonik Bible,'" *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 9 (1989): 17–30; Robert N. Hullinger, *Joseph Smith's Response to Skepticism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), which is a revised version of Hullinger's *Mormon Answer to Skepticism: Why Joseph Smith Wrote the Book of Mormon* (St. Louis: Clayton, 1980); and most recently John L.

Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1944), 149–83.

45. Those who search for the sources for the Book of Mormon seem oblivious to what Hugh Nibley describes as the absurdity of such an undertaking, since it is simply impossible to uncover the indisputable source of anyone's ideas, "let alone those of a man whose world, with all the myriad sights and sounds that *might* conceivably have given him those ideas, has passed away over a century ago. Armed with this naive creed and a determination to 'uncover' something," Nibley argues, the critics eventually find something and then announce that the sources for the Book of Mormon have been located. See Nibley, *Prophetic Book*, 170.

46. Jan Shipps relies on Brodie for her description of Mormonism as a "new religious tradition," if not for what Shipps calls her "sustained argument" (see Shipps, *Mormonism*, 169 n. 2).

47. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 415.

48. For a discussion of this issue, see Dale L. Morgan, *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism*, (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 25–9, 84–119. See also Bernard DeVoto, letter to Fawn M. Brodie, 28 December 1945; Dale L. Morgan, letter to Brodie, 28 January 1946; and Morgan, letter to Brodie, 28 January 1946 (all letters are available at the Marriott Library Special Collections at the University of Utah).

49. See Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 418–9.

50. Phyllis Greenacre, "The Impostor," *Psychological Quarterly* 27 (1958): 359–82. It was Brodie who tried to liken Joseph Smith to Greenacre's "impostor." For some idea of Brodie's grasp of psychoanalytic literature, see the notes she made at various meetings of the Los Angeles Interdisciplinary Psychoanalytic Group. These are entitled "Joseph Smith—(first meeting)" and "Original Notes First J. S. [Joseph Smith] Meeting & Greenacre," and an item simply entitled "The Impostor." These are available in the Brodie Papers, MS 360, bx. 8, fld. 1 and fld. 2, Special Collections at the Marriott Library, University of Utah. They are embarrassing. For example, "in his [Joseph Smith's] operation as a child he was saved by amputation (castration) by his mother." Or "Gods (the

angel) showed Joseph Smith a sword (the phallus); a breastplate and two stones (the mother); and the golden plates (anal element)." Is there any wonder that psychobiography or psychohistory is suspect? For a similar criticism of Brodie's involvement in psychological explanations of Joseph Smith, see Gary F. Novak, "Naturalistic Assumptions and the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 23–40.

51. See Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 419.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.* See also note 50.

54. See Dale L. Morgan's review of Brodie's *No Man Knows My History*, published as "A Prophet and His Legend," *Saturday Review*, 24 November 1945, pp. 7–8.

55. For examinations of the reviews of Brodie's biography of Thomas Jefferson, see Louis Midgley, "The Brodie Connection: Thomas Jefferson and Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 20/1 (1979): 59–67; Jerry Knudson, "Jefferson the Father of Slave Children? One View of the Book Reviewers," *Journalism History* 3/2 (1976): 56–8; Hugh W. Nibley, "A Note on F. M. Brodie," in *Tinkling Cymbals*, 49–52; and Louis Midgley, "F.M. Brodie—'The Fasting Hermit and Very Saint of Ignorance': A Biographer and Her Legend," *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996):147–230.

56. Nibley, *Prophetic Book*, 8:151.

57. *Ibid.*, 148.

58. *Ibid.*, 151.

59. *Ibid.*

60. See Nibley, *No Ma'am, That's Not History: A Brief Review of Mrs. Brodie's Reluctant Vindication of a Prophet She Seeks to Expose* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946). For a brief description of the public and private quarrels surrounding the exchange between Brodie and Nibley, see Louis Midgley, "Hugh Winder Nibley: Bibliography and Register," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday, 27 March 1990*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (FARMS and Deseret Book, 1990), 1: xix–xx.

61. According to Richard Bushman, "No one has exceeded

Hugh Nibley's appreciation for the complexity of the Book of Mormon" (Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 229 n. 17, citing three of Nibley's books on the Book of Mormon). For an exhaustive annotated bibliography of Nibley's writings from 1926 to 1989, see Midgley, "Hugh Winder Nibley," xv–lxxxvii.

62. Sterling McMurrin, "An Interview with Sterling McMurrin," interview by Blake Ostler, *Dialogue* 17/1 (1984): 25. This interview also appeared under the title "The History of Mormonism and Church Authorities: An Interview with Sterling M. McMurrin," *Free Inquiry* 4/1 (1983–1984): 32–4, alongside George D. Smith's revisionist account, "Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon," *ibid.*, 21–31.

63. See Louis Midgley, "Atheists and Cultural Mormons Promote a Naturalistic Humanism," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 277–95.

64. Sterling McMurrin proclaimed that he was simply unable "to take the Book of Mormon seriously as an authentic record, considering the claims of its coming from an angel and being translated by a miracle." He also claimed that it "has a confused theology and is a mixture of good and bad religion." But he also like to boast that he had "never read the entire Book of Mormon." See L. Jackson Newell, ed., *Matters of Conscience: Conversations with Sterling M. McMurrin on Philosophy, Education, and Religion* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 114.

65. See, for example, Hill, "Historiography," 418–9, and compare this with his remarks in his "The 'New Mormon History' Reassessed in the Light of Recent Books on Joseph Smith and Mormon Origins," *Dialogue* 21/3 (1988): 125. Hill has, however, striven to fashion his own identity by distancing himself somewhat from certain details in Brodie's explanation of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. For an account of this distancing in the case of Hill, see Novak, "Naturalistic Assumptions," 21–40.

66. Marvin S. Hill, "Secular or Sectarian History? A Critique of *No Man Knows My History*," *Church History* 43/1 (March 1974): 96, reprinted without changes in Newell G. Bringhurst, ed., *Reconsidering No Man Knows My History: Fawn M. Brodie and Joseph Smith*

in *Retrospect* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996), 60–93 (quote on p. 83). See also Hill's "Brodie Revisited: A Reappraisal," *Dialogue* 7/4 (1972): 72–85. For a careful criticism of Hill's stance, see Novak, "Naturalistic Assumptions," 23–40.

67. See, for example, Brent Lee Metcalfe, "Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity," *Dialogue* 26/3 (1993): 153–84, and compare William J. Hamblin, "An Apologist for the Critics: Brent Lee Metcalfe's Assumptions and Methodologies," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 434–523. David P. Wright provides another excellent example in his "Historical Criticism: A Necessary Element in the Search for Religious Truth," *Sunstone* 16/3 (September 1992): 28–38. Hamblin gives a detailed response to Wright's essay in his "The Final Step," *Sunstone* 16/5 (July 1993): 11–2. Compare Wright's response in "A Continuing Journey," *Sunstone* 16/5 (July 1993): 12–4.

68. See Anthony A. Hutchinson, "A Mormon Midrash? LDS Creation Narratives in Redaction-Critical Perspective" (paper presented at the Mormon Historical Association meeting, Omaha, Nebr., May 1983). A version of this paper was eventually published as "A Mormon Midrash? LDS Creation Narratives Reconsidered," *Dialogue* 21/4 (1988): 11–74. For a response to this essay, see Louis Midgley, "The Challenge of Historical Consciousness: Mormon History and the Encounter with Secular Modernity," in *By Study and Also By Faith*, 2: 502–51; and Midgley, "The Acids of Modernity and the Crisis in Mormon Historiography," in *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History*, ed. George D. Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 189–225.

69. Anthony A. Hutchinson, "The Word of God Is Enough: The Book of Mormon as Nineteenth-Century Scripture," *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 1–29.

70. See Edwin Firmage Jr., "Historical Criticism and the Book of Mormon: A Personal Encounter," *Sunstone* 16/5 (July 1993): 58–64.

71. *Ibid.*, 64.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid. Note the revealing word *altogether*. What is not said is that to take the course recommended by this author is to abandon much of the faith, including its essential historical grounding.

74. See Metcalfe, *New Approaches*. A number of important responses to this book appeared in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994). See also Alan Goff, "Uncritical Theory and Thin Description: The Resistance to History," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 170–207; and Kevin Christensen, "Paradigms Crossed," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/2 (1995): 144–218.

75. David P. Wright, "In Plain Terms That We May Understand," *New Approaches*, 211.

76. Ibid., 212.

77. See Hutchinson, "Word of God," 1–19. For a detailed response to Hutchinson's argument, see Louis Midgley, "The Current Battle over the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 200–54.

78. Wright, "In Plain Terms," 166.

79. George D. Smith Jr., introduction to *Faithful History*, ix.

80. Lawrence Foster, "A Radical Misstatement," *Dialogue* 22/2 (1989): 6. Foster also says, "For example, consider Louis Midgley's ridiculous assertion that there is 'no middle ground' in approaching Latter-day Saint history."

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid.

83. See Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 187–8, for a fine treatment of this issue.

84. See Shippo, *Mormonism*, 1–64. See also Louis Midgley, "The Shippo Odyssey in Retrospect," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/2 (1995): 219–52.

85. See Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992) 40, 79–128.

86. Bernard DeVoto, "Centennial," 5.