



All Theses and Dissertations

---

2007-07-10

# Taking Mormons Seriously: Ethics of Representing Latter-day Saints in American Fiction

Terrol Roark Williams

*Brigham Young University - Provo*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

## BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Williams, Terrol Roark, "Taking Mormons Seriously: Ethics of Representing Latter-day Saints in American Fiction" (2007). *All Theses and Dissertations*. 1159.

<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/1159>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

TAKING MORMONS SERIOUSLY: ETHICS OF REPRESENTING  
LATTER-DAY SAINTS IN AMERICAN FICTION

by

Terrol R. Williams

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English

Brigham Young University

August 2007

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Terrol R. Williams

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Gideon O. Burton, Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Susan Elizabeth Howe, Reader

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phillip A. Snyder, Reader

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Frank Q. Christianson, Graduate Advisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nicholas Mason, Associate Chair for  
Graduate Studies

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phillip A. Snyder, Graduate Coordinator

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Terrol Williams in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations, and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

---

Date

---

Gideon O. Burton  
Chair, Graduate Committee

Accepted for the Department

---

Phillip A. Snyder  
Graduate Coordinator

Accepted for the College

---

Gregory D. Clark  
Associate Dean, College of Humanities

## ABSTRACT

### TAKING MORMONS SERIOUSLY: ETHICS OF REPRESENTING LATTER-DAY SAINTS IN AMERICAN FICTION

Terrol R. Williams

Department of English

Master of Arts

My paper examines the ethics of representing Mormons in serious American fiction, viewed through two primary texts, Bayard Taylor's nineteenth-century dramatic poem *The Prophet* and Maureen Whipple's epic novel *The Giant Joshua*. I also briefly examine Walter Kirn's short stories "Planetarium" and "Whole Other Bodies." Using Werner Sollors' and Matthew Frye Jacobson's writings on ethnicity as foundational, I argue in that Mormonism constitutes an ethnicity, which designation accentuates the ethical demands of those who represent the group. I also use W.J.T. Mitchell's theories of representation as the basis of my arguments of the ethics of representing ethnicity. As ethical theorists, Emmanuel Levinas and Edward Said inform the theoretical framework of my project, and I place their theories both in opposition to and harmony with each

other in terms of what it means to be truly “Other” and the responsibility of those who view, represent, project, or accept otherness as essential to being. I also borrow from Wayne C. Booth, particularly in his practical application of ethics theory. I employ Terry Givens, Michael Austin, Bruce Jorgensen, and Gideon Burton to help bring the theory into the field of Mormon studies. In applying all these theorists to Taylor and Whipple I examine Taylor’s exoticizing, “Othering” Mormons, creating an “Oriental” version of the rise of Mormonism, parallel to some of his Middle Eastern travel writing. Taylor also makes the remarkable ethical step of being the first non-Mormon to “take Mormons seriously” in literary fiction. I demonstrate how his use of classical literary forms and themes moves the ethical treatment of Mormons forward in an unprecedented way. Maureen Whipple relies on some of the sensational, romantic tropes in common use, but overall she also moves forward ethical representation of Mormons in serious literature, being the best-received of “Mormondom’s Lost Generation” of literary writers. In conclusion I argue that these texts, along with the more problematic Kirn stories, help create a positive ethical climate for Mormon representation.

Contents

Introduction - The Promise and Challenge of Mormonism as Literary Subject.....1

Chapter One - Mormonism as Ethnicity and the Anxiety of Representation .....10

Chapter Two - Bayard Taylor's *The Prophet* and the Nineteenth Century .....46

Chapter Three - *The Giant Joshua* and Maureen Whipple .....70

Conclusion – Creating a Climate for Ethical Representations.....107

Works Cited .....121

Figures

Figure 1: New Yorker cartoon, “Are we ethnic?” .....10

Figure 2: W.J.T. Mitchell’s Representational diamond.....18

Figure 3: Bayard Taylor and servant in Arab clothing. ....57

Figure 4: W.J.T. Mitchell’s Representational diamond (reprinted).....89

## The Promise and Challenge of Mormonism as Literary Subject

A major American poet, perhaps one called a Gentile by the Latter-day Saints, some time in the future will write their early story as the epic it was. Nothing else in all of American history strikes me as *materia poetica* equal to the early Mormons, to Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Parley and Orson Pratt, and the men and women who were their followers and friends. —Harold Bloom (79)

There are things inherently vulgar, things to which no varnish will give a gloss, and on which the fancy contents only grudgingly to rest her eyes. Mormonism is one of these; an attempt to import Joseph Smith into romance, even very much diluted and arranged, must in the nature of things fall flat. —Henry James (qtd. in Mordell 236)

Against the backdrop of a nation struggling with its own identity, after only about fifty years of existence as an independent state, emerged the Latter-day Saints, a challenge to the nation's consideration of itself as pluralistic. In *The Viper on the Hearth*, Terryl Givens describes this strain as “the problem nineteenth-century writers and critics of Mormonism faced in reconciling a rhetoric of vituperation and a practice of exclusion with an ideology of Jeffersonian religious toleration and pluralism” (7). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has, from its birth, challenged this toleration and pluralism, both culturally and literarily. Much of the fiction which has included Mormons over the past 177 years has been popular, playing up the sensational elements of Mormonism. Contemporary popular fiction and media have frequently perpetuated many of the old stereotypes summarized by Neal Lambert: “When the Mormon antagonist was

not sly, dark, and seductive, he was usually fat, boorish, and uncouth” (65).

Representations of Mormons and Mormonism in serious literature, however, have, at least in some cases, developed over time, becoming more complex, nuanced, and sensitive, if not entirely free of stereotypes. Various writers have made efforts to “take Mormons seriously”—to portray Mormons as complete, complex individuals and to treat Mormonism as an important cultural and ethnic group made up of individuals whose lives go beyond mere caricatures of blind faith or sinister lechery.

The LDS Church was organized during an era of burgeoning printing and an increasing public appetite for fiction: the more sensational—even salacious—the better. The stereotypes in early anti-Mormon fiction weren’t really new; they were just adaptations of standard villains and comics, used numerous times on other targets (Catholics and Masons in particular, as Givens notes throughout *The Viper on the Hearth*). In the nineteenth century the difference of Mormons was itself sufficient cause for their excoriation in fiction, for “heresy was self-evidently evil” (Givens 161). Such an environment set the stage for numerous sensational stories about Mormons, each using some combination of the stereotypes and stock villains mentioned by Lambert. Givens mentions several of these tales, including *The Mormoness; or, the Trials of Mary Maverick*, by John Russell (109), published in 1853; 1876’s *Bessie Baine: the Mormon’s Victim*, by M. Quad [Charles Bertrand Lewis] (117); Mrs. A.G. Paddock’s *The Fate of Madame La Tour*, published in 1881 (106); De Los Lull’s *Father Solon; or the Helper Helped*, 1888 (117); and so on. Givens effectively places these texts and their sensational anti-Mormon elements in the context of such movements as anti-Catholicism and anti-Masonry.

Today, of course, difference is generally not vilified but often a cause for celebrating diversity (Karem 161). The privileging of diversity means that difference itself is not reason for rejection. Consequently, the old bases for attacking the Mormons must today either be discarded or changed in form and substance to accommodate new sensitivities. Could Mormons receive a more sympathetic, less stereotypical treatment at the hands of contemporary non-LDS writers?

Neal Lambert writes that “Mormons and Mormonism offer almost insurmountable literary difficulties” (64). Such difficulties stem in part from the spectacular origins of the Latter-day Saint religion and culture, including theophany, angelic visitations, gold plates, etc., the sensational cultural practices (polygamy being the most obvious, but by no means unique, example), the secrecy of its temple ordinances, and its rigid hierarchical and authoritarian structure. But it can certainly be argued that all of the above elements make for some pretty interesting story-telling, fact or fiction. And they have been used as such by writers as diverse as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (*A Study in Scarlet*), 1887; Zane Grey (*Riders of the Purple Sage*), 1912; and John Gardner (*Mickelsson’s Ghosts*), 1982.

This paradox, a sensational history that makes serious literary treatment challenging, undoubtedly forms the basis of historian and fiction writer Bernard DeVoto’s opinion, quoted by Edward Geary in his essay on Mormondom’s “Lost Generation. DeVoto

predicted failure for anyone who tried “to compose fiction out of Joseph Smith and the Mormon people.” He declared that “God, the best storyteller, has made a better story out of Joseph and the Mormon wandering

than fiction will ever equal” and called his own Mormon novel “the best book I am never going to write.” (71-72)

DeVoto understood, and succinctly summarized, both Mormonism’s remarkable story (Bloom’s *materia poetica*) and the great difficulties of re-telling that story as literature.

In contrast to the old stereotypes of the Mormon seducer or idiot, new stereotypes have arisen from contemporary Mormonism’s efforts to assimilate itself into American society. As discussed further in Chapter One, these include such traits as purported docility, subservience, and politically and culturally conservative uniformity. Mormons, by many contemporary accounts, are a staid, stolid, hard-working, backwards, predictable bunch—especially in today’s American society. Variations on this theme in recent decades have been used briefly by (among others) John LeCarré (in *The Russia House*) in disapproval, and by Tom Clancy (in *Clear and Present Danger*) in admiration. LeCarré’s character Ned refers to two creepy, ominous, “trim, . . . characterless” Americans as “Mormons” (177-79). Clancy’s Jack Ryan extols the solid, hard-working patriotism of the Mormons whose temple he admires as he drives through Washington, D.C. Join these two disparate perceptions of Mormons and Mormonism (the sensational and the staid) and one can easily see why Lambert described the difficulties of a literary portrayal as “almost insurmountable.”

Yet, in spite of popular (mis)conceptions, Mormons do offer great serious literary opportunities and appeal. Certainly the epic nature of early Church history appealed to Harold Bloom, as stated above. The founding of a new community, its persecution, exodus, and stand-off against what it perceived to be an oppressive government are the stuff of myths and have become just that in the eyes of Latter-day Saints and many

observers. Most information about Mormons in public school history books revolves around their settling of the West. But does the appeal extend beyond the myth of the founding of a new community, its persecution and exodus? Some combination of such elements is fundamental to practically all frontier tales, from the pilgrims to the Gold Rush and even much science fiction. Frontier elements combine to form most of the romanticism of the first fifty years of the Church's history. They contribute to the cultural and ethnic nature of the Latter-day Saint community, especially due to Mormon isolationism.

This context provides the framework for the texts analyzed in this study. In Chapter One I establish the theoretical grounds for examining what constitutes ethical or responsible treatment of Mormons in fiction, especially by those not of the faith. Using Edward Said and Emmanuel Levinas as a basis for a discussion of alterity and the ethics of representation, I discuss the apparent contradiction between their two approaches to the "Other" and the ethics of acknowledging and projecting alterity itself. I also argue for a Mormon ethnicity, placing Latter-day Saints among other cultural and religious, if not racial, traditions. Such an argument presupposes an anxiety of representation. Inherent in any group which attempts to establish a cohesive ethnic boundary is a concern over how it is to be represented and who has authority to represent it. On this foundation of the ethics and anxiety of representation the next chapters will examine two significant texts as foundational in serious Mormon representation: Bayard Taylor's *The Prophet* (late nineteenth century) and Maureen Whipple's *The Giant Joshua* (mid-twentieth century).

Bayard Taylor offered one of the earliest attempts by a non-Mormon to treat Mormons as a subject for serious fiction. His efforts reflect an era in which virtually all

representations of Mormons could be categorized as projections of fears and fantasies of the encompassing culture. In fact, Thomas D. Schwartz, in his analysis of the text, calls Taylor's *The Prophet* "the only significant break in [the] silence" of literary writers regarding Mormonism (*BYU Studies* 236). Taylor was a fairly popular travel writer and poet who "included among his friends such illuminati as Twain . . . , Howells, Longfellow, Holmes, Whittier, and Bryant" (Schwartz, Thesis 6). While obviously not among the most durable of these writers, Taylor was regarded in his day as a man of letters, and he considered *The Prophet* "by far the best thing I have ever written" (Hansen-Taylor 638). He wrote to two friends a letter describing a "much more ambitious and important conception, which I have carried in my head for seven years past . . . at last put into words" (634). At the time of its writing, at least, Taylor regarded this work as his magnum opus.

*The Prophet* serves as the first pivotal text for my discussion. Taylor tries to elevate what had been almost exclusively salacious, sensational material—the rise of Joseph Smith and Mormonism—to the level of an epic tragedy. Yet he fails to escape the temptation to exoticize the Mormons and, in a very Orientalist move, interweaves the great American story of Joseph Smith with the Muslim East, of which he had written extensively as a travel writer. *The Prophet* exemplifies the difficult challenges Neal Lambert describes in dealing with Mormonism seriously—how to represent something as bizarre and exotic as, for example, polygamy, without resorting to old tropes and stereotypes. Bayard Taylor has mixed success at best, but his effort is itself remarkable, particularly in its era.

Maureen Whipple's *The Giant Joshua* has been described by Eugene England as "The Greatest but Not the Great Mormon Novel." It clearly emerges from a transitional era in the history of Mormon culture and literature, the era of Mormonism's "Lost Generation" of writers, and invites a discussion of the paradox facing writers who are both cultural insiders and outsiders—who grow up in the Mormon culture but who subsequently experience an exile of sorts, either self- or community-imposed or, in the case of Whipple, both. For Whipple *The Giant Joshua* represented an honest effort to explore and portray the epic story of the settlement of Utah's desert land and the equally significant journey of faith of the Mormons who settled it. The reception of *Giant Joshua* is equally significant to this project, since it disenchanted Whipple's neighbors and Church leaders and left Whipple an exile among her own people. Whipple may have created characters that at times lapse into stereotypes, yet she was clearly treating Mormons, their leaders, doctrine, and even the process of gaining a testimony, seriously (although not always in ways sympathetic to Mormon orthodoxy). She also, in her detailed accounts of the struggles of daily pioneer life, including folk remedies and a monumental battle with the Virgin River, creates a very sympathetic portrait of Latter-day Saints as a community protagonist, offering a complexity to the old literary dichotomy of orthodoxy vs. heterodoxy, since the unity of such a community was essential both to its physical preservation in the face of a daunting climate and its spiritual preservation after much persecution and betrayal.

In conclusion I revisit the main ethical criteria used in analyzing these two foundational texts and update this discussion to the increasing pluralism and relativism of contemporary literature and criticism. I will briefly discuss two short stories by Walter

Kirn, who himself occupies a similar position to Whipple's, as an insider of sorts—a convert to the Mormon Church as a young man; and as an outsider—one who, while fully participating in the Church's activities and culture as a teenager, left as a young adult. These stories, "Planetarium" and "Whole Other Bodies," illustrate the continuing ethical challenges faced by literary writers representing contemporary Mormonism. Kirn's move away from Mormonism in his latest novel, *Mission to America*, indicates (by his own admission) an anxiety over portraying Mormons and Mormonism. Such anxiety brings contemporary ethics into full view, with its "baggage": fear of public outcry and even possible reprisals, multiculturalist impulses to accept and celebrate cultural (and, to a lesser degree, religious) differences, and broader cultural exposure. I will suggest an ethical matrix which combines the criteria of ethics suggested by Levinas and Said with broad contemporary ethical sensitivities to create a standard against which the ethics of those who write about Mormons, particularly when they target broad literary audiences, can be candidly evaluated.

These two major texts, as well as the Kirn stories discussed in the conclusion, represent significant literary efforts of their day to "take Mormons seriously" and, as such, are productive veins in which a reader can mine the ethical questions that Said and Levinas define. They also can be viewed as texts representative of literary eras, especially related to Mormons and their perceptions and representations.

The very acts of creating more round Mormon characters and of attempting to tackle the nuances of a traditionally vilified religion and culture represent progressive steps, and each of these writers moves the Mormon representation in a generally positive direction. However, while each writer continues a progression toward responsible

depictions of Mormonism, all three have challenges and “backsliding” of sorts, indicating that, while much progress has been made, even serious fiction has much room for an improved or at least more sensitive ethical representation.

## Chapter One - Mormonism as Ethnicity and the Anxiety of Representation



Fig. 1 *New Yorker* cartoon, "Are we ethnic?" rpt. in Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 1987).  
 <<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/byuprovo/Top?id=10086803&layout=document>>.

Werner Sollors, in *Beyond Ethnicity*, reproduces a 1972 *New Yorker* cartoon with a white father, mother, and daughter, well-dressed and evidently upper middle-class, sitting at an elegant dinner. The daughter asks her parents, "Are we ethnic?" (see fig. 1) (24). In a discussion of the ethics of representing Mormons and Mormonism, Latter-day Saints essentially ask the same question, and with some of the humorous overtones of the cartoon. Are Mormons, in fact, an ethnicity? Does such a designation matter? It may, since respecting others' ethnicities has become an expectation in today's multicultural society. Today, the designation "ethnicity," in contrast to the pejorative nature of the term in the past, has become a badge of honor, a title of power and protection (Karem 161). If writers should feel the same ethical responsibility when representing Mormons that they

do when representing other groups, as I argue, this question must be addressed, if not definitively answered.

Defining ethnicity precisely may be a near impossibility. Sollors writes that “It makes little sense to define ‘ethnicity-as-such,’ since it refers not to a thing-in-itself but to a relationship: ethnicity is typically based on a *contrast*” (“Ethnicity” 288). Nonetheless, if Mormons can be considered an ethnicity, such a category must be established on some meaningful ground. Elsewhere Sollors explains the etymology of the word “ethnic,” which stems from the Greek *ethnikos*, meaning “gentile” or “heathen.” The term came to be used in the Old and New Testaments in reference to gentiles or non-Christians, and had a distinctly pejorative tone. More recently, “the English language has retained the pagan memory of ‘ethnic,’ often secularized in the sense of ethnic as other, as nonstandard, or, in America, as not fully American” (Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity* 25). The term lost its specific religiosity but retained its pejorative sense. Sollors quotes anthropologist Fredrik Barth declaring that it is “the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses” (27). Throughout its etymology, “ethnicity” has been characterized not so much by what constitutes a particular group (what that group is) as it is where one group ends and another begins (how that group isn’t mainstream, either religiously or culturally).

Of course, the very idea of ethnicity has continued to evolve. Today it retains its aspects of “otherness,” but largely without the negative aspects ethnicity had in the past.

In contemporary usage ethnicity has largely been transformed from a heathenish liability into a sacred asset, from a trait to be overcome . . . to a

very desirable identity feature to be achieved through . . . regeneration . . . every American is now considered a potential ethnic. (*Beyond Ethnicity* 33)

In fact, Sollors identifies efforts by ethnic groups to reestablish their difference, their ethnicity, in which

some ingroup speakers . . . scolded blacks as Oreos, Asians as bananas, Indians as apples, and Chicanos as coconuts—all with the structurally identical criticism ‘they’re white inside!’ The warning had no specific cultural content but served as an interchangeable exhortation to maintain boundaries. (*Beyond Ethnicity* 28)

In some circles, then, one becomes a sort of cultural traitor by not being ethnic enough, clearly indicating a privileged status and power of sorts among ethnicities, particularly (but hardly exclusively) in their own communities. Because of the status and power of ethnicity, groups now embrace and defend the designation with an almost religious fervor.

The most obvious, contentious, and increasingly complicated element of ethnicity is race. Perhaps because of its “obviousness,” its apparent base in “nature,” race may be the most deceptive element as well. The racial issue in ethnicity forms the core of Sollors’ “descent vs. consent” argument, and Matthew Frye Jacobson, in *Whiteness of a Different Color*, provocatively titles his introduction “The Fabrication of Race.” In that chapter he declares that “races are invented categories—designations coined for the sake of grouping and separating peoples along lines of presumed difference” (4). Later he adds, “race resides not in nature but in politics and culture” (9). For Jacobson race is just

as much a construct as the status of “gentile” or “heathen,” and resides squarely in the middle of qualifications for ethnic status—no higher than any other element. Sollors agrees “with [a] universalist interpretation according to which ethnicity includes dominant groups and in which race, while sometimes facilitating external identification, is merely one aspect of ethnicity” (*Beyond Ethnicity* 36). While these two writers might disagree on what constitutes race, they do not offer it excessive privilege in ethnic groups. The classification of race as an element not inherent to ethnicity is important to the argument that Mormonism constitutes an ethnicity, since, while most of its adherents descend from Western European stock and there are some pockets of particular nationalities and cultures (particularly as Brigham Young sent groups of immigrant converts to settle areas outside the Church’s headquarters in northern Utah, such as the Scandinavians in Utah’s Sanpete County), it contains no distinct or inherent racial component.

Another significant factor, particularly as it relates to Mormons, is the idea of ethnic space. Since ethnicity is fundamentally a question of boundaries, geographical separation frequently contributes to establishing an ethnicity. Ethnic groups are sometimes literally distanced from the mainstream in places such as housing districts, ghettos, or Indian reservations. Sometimes the groups themselves seek to establish some kind of geographical location to distance themselves from the mainstream society. This geographical or spatial separation can be compulsory, voluntary, or, probably most commonly, some combination of the two. Physical separation plays a particularly important role in nascent or threatened ethnic movements. In later stages of ethnic progression the geographical separation decreases in importance as some ethnic groups

become increasingly integrated into mainstream society. As sociologist Armand Mauss discusses below, Mormons' physical separation from the world, originally all but essential to its group identity, continues to decrease in importance as the LDS Church moves further toward the social mainstream.

Establishing ethnicity, based on these criteria, becomes increasingly attractive as the power and privilege accorded ethnicities increase. As race diminishes as an absolute requirement for ethnicity, the door opens to widespread appropriation of ethnic status. Because ethnic identity depends upon distinctions from others, what happens when everyone wants to be ethnic? Does ethnicity lose meaning when applied to an ever-expanding number of groups?

These questions lead to perhaps the key element in any particular group's designation as an "ethnicity": the degree to which the group is perceived as mainstream, either by itself or by others. Once a particular group gains a certain status and acceptance, that group loses, to some degree, its ethnicity. Hence we read Jewish writer Leonard Fein declaring that "We are too much an oppressed people, still, and too much a rejected people, even in this country, to accept the designation 'white'" (qtd. in Jacobson 279-80). Fein's declaration indicates a combination of anxieties stemming from the desirability of being "white," even if such "whiteness" is offered. The first anxiety is whether or not Jews have been accepted enough by the broader "white" culture. In Fein's mind, at least, this has clearly not yet happened (though Philip Roth's Jewish character in *Counterlife* begs to differ: "We're not a race . . . we're the same race . . . I am Caucasian, kiddo" [qtd. in Jacobson 2]). Another anxiety lurks within this one: what happens if the group is accepted? If Jews become "white" (for Fein indicating fully mainstreamed) what is

gained and what is lost? Certainly the power of the majority is gained, with deeper and broader access to its offices and structures. But, as we have seen, losing one's ethnic status also means losing power and protection. Hence the pejorative references, quoted earlier, to "Oreos," "bananas," "apples," and "coconuts"—all have color only on the outside, but aren't "other" enough on the inside—they're too white to be truly ethnic.

Since ethnicity is, at its heart, an issue of boundaries and representation, any discussion of representing Mormonism will necessarily grapple with the issue of Mormon ethnicity. Mormons are, by every standard delineated above (except race) an ethnic group. Givens considers the ethnic question the "decisive factor in the way Mormonism is perceived and depicted" (17). For Givens, the starting point of Mormon ethnicity "has to do with [Mormonism's] emergence from indigenous origins into a community with cultural autonomy" (17). Mormonism had "its own history, its own traditions, its conviction of peculiarity, and even its native territory or homeland" (qtd. in Givens 17). Mormon leaders even went so far as to create their own phonetic alphabet, the Deseret alphabet. "Clearly," he concludes, "the group transcended merely denominational status fairly early in the nineteenth century, and was *represented* as something akin to an ethnic community" (17). Mormons both represented themselves and were represented by others as religiously, culturally, and linguistically different. In an interesting linguistic parallel to the origins and development of the ethnic designation, even the nickname "Mormons" was originally imposed by antagonists and later willingly appropriated by the Church.

Religiously, Mormonism fits the ethnic bill perfectly. Throughout its history the LDS Church has been defined, by itself and by others, as something distinctly different from every other religious tradition. Its history is not one of Protestantism, but of

Restoration. It does not split off from traditional Christianity; it claims to restore the original Christian church. Latter-day Saints and members of other religions agree that doctrinal differences among the groups are profound and fundamental (one of the reasons for the ongoing argument over whether Mormons are actually Christian). Mormons are clearly different from even their closest religious cousins, let alone those of starkly different religious traditions, or atheists.

Geographically Mormons were driven, internally and externally, to establish a separate community. Physicality and literal geography has always been important to Mormons—God has a physical, human body; priesthood power is conferred only by a corporeal being; the Garden of Eden is set in Missouri; and the temple is a literal dwelling place for God on the earth. These are among the various unique physical aspects of Mormon Christianity. With such a doctrinal foundation, it should come as no surprise that as early as five months after the Church's organization the Latter-day Saints were already concerned, as shown in LDS book of scripture Doctrine and Covenants (D&C) section 28, with the specific geographical location of the city of Zion, the New Jerusalem where the temple would be built and the resurrected Lord would appear at His Second Coming. From 1830 on the Church was in an almost constant state of movement or anticipation of movement—seeking to establish a place for the Kingdom of God to flourish, apart from “Babylon”—the World. Later on in Mormon history, the importance of finding a separate geographical location became not just a matter of religious doctrine but of physical survival, as persecution increased and physical attacks on Latter-day Saints became more frequent. Of course, the epic story of the Mormon exodus, to establish a separate, theocratic society government in the desert, has become one of the

best-known pieces of Mormon history. In terms of physical and geographical separation, Mormonism again qualifies as ethnicity.

Even the racial component played a key part in early Mormon representation, at least by non-Mormons. Givens documents the non-Mormon “refusal to consider Mormons as ‘white,’” including a story by Jack London in which a boy speaks of apparently white men, saying “‘They ain’t whites . . . They’re Mormons;” another adventure story in which the hero justifies helping a Mormon boy by telling his friends that “‘He seems to be a white man and all right, even if he is a Mormon;” and, perhaps most remarkably, a non-fiction account by a U.S. army surgeon in which Mormons are identified as a “new race” (135). In *The Mormon Graphic Image, 1834-1914* Gary L. Bunker and Davis Bitton show numerous instances of Mormons being lumped with African-Americans, Chinese, Irish, Native Americans, and any other race or ethnicity considered inferior at the time. The purpose was clear: since mainstream race and ethnicity were standard indicators of acceptability at the time, classifying Mormons as an ethnicity made it easier for a supposedly religiously pluralistic society to openly attack the Latter-day Saints. The adjective “ethnic” in the nineteenth century was still a distancing, pejorative term. Ethnicity was not distinguished from race, at least in its effect, and where race was not an inherent issue, as with Mormons, it was fabricated, to make it easier to create the new ethnic group.

Beginning with Sollors and Jacobson, we can usefully describe ethnicity as a construction of boundaries. In this sense, ethnicity informs the philosophy of ethics, specifically the ethics of representation, and will play into the exploration of the texts to be discussed below.

Representational theory hinges on the crossing of boundaries. W.J.T. Mitchell visually portrays two axes of representation—first, the relationship between the

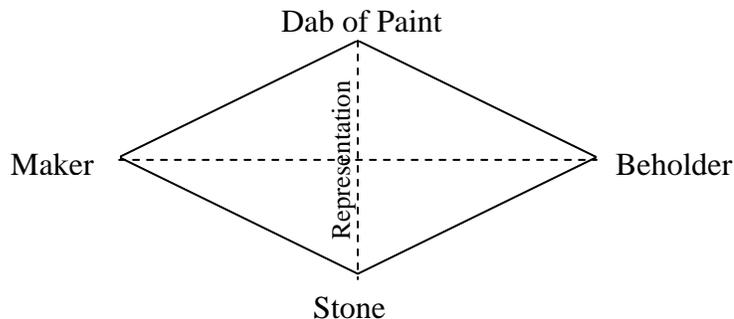


Fig. 2, Representational diamond, from W.J.T. Mitchell, “Representation” *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. 2nd ed. Ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995) 12.

represented and what represents it. In this case, a stone (the represented) is represented by a dab of paint. This relationship creates a vertical axis. The horizontal axis depicts a

relationship between the “beholder” and the “maker. In portraying the crossing axes of representation this way, Mitchell demonstrates potentially conflicting loyalties involved in any representation—to the thing represented and to the “beholder.” The very act of portraying one thing using another creates this dual ethical responsibility. Mitchell’s axes of representation are also crossings of implied boundaries—between “reality” and the representation, and between maker and beholder. The act of crossing these boundaries is an inherently ethical, even a political, act (Mitchell 15). Because there is an implied acceptance between maker and beholder (“I will accept, for the purpose of this act of literature or art, that X represents Y”), even though they may disagree fundamentally at any number of levels, the act of representation always involves a responsibility to all four corners of Mitchell’s diamond—each end of the two representational axes.

This representational responsibility is fundamental to the question of ethics and ethnicity, and one can raise ethical challenges to each of the connections in Mitchell’s representational diamond. Representation at any level inherently implies some level of

understanding, which declares authority: if I offer a portrayal of something or especially someone else, I always ask the beholder to accept my representational authority over that thing or person I am representing. I declare myself, in the act of representing, to be at some level an authority on that object, on the represented.

Such authority, explicit or implicit, is essentially suspect and demands ethical interrogation. Because of this implied authority, the Maker has the most obvious representational responsibilities—probably foremost to the object represented (Mitchell’s stone), particularly when it comes to ethnicity—but also to the Beholder. What effect will the representation have on the Beholder? On the Beholder’s view of the represented object? What will happen to the relationship between the Beholder and the represented object?

Representational responsibility is not one-sided, however. The Beholder has an ethical obligation to view the representation responsibly—to view or read the medium with a critical eye, aware of the ethical implications of such a representation. Such responsibility extends to the relationship between Maker and represented object—if the Beholder misinterprets the Maker’s representation just as much harm can be done to the Maker and his relationship to the represented object (as well as to the object itself) as the Maker can do with irresponsible representing.

An anecdote here offers a simple illustration of these ethical roles and their accompanying responsibilities. In January 1999 David Howard, a top aide to Washington D.C. Mayor Anthony A. Williams, resigned because of offense taken when he used the word “niggardly” while describing a city fund’s budget (Woodlee). The representation itself was tame—a budget element was being described as miserly—but its consequences

were dramatic. The mix-up obviously resulted from the word's similarity to "nigger," an extremely offensive racial epithet. In the ensuing media furor, the bulk of the excoriation, including that of NAACP Chairman Julian Bond, was directed toward the mayor and his office for taking offense not only where none was intended, but where none was even implied. Such a response illustrates the responsibility of the Beholder to the Maker and to his representation. In this case it cost the Maker (Howard) his job.

But even in what appears to be a fairly obvious ethical case, there is another side to the responsibility. Should Howard, the representer, have been more aware of his audience and chosen a different word? Ronald Walters, a professor of political science at the University of Maryland, placed responsibility on the Maker as well as the Beholder:

"This is a problem of political inexperience on all sides compounded by culture ignorance on all sides," Walters said. "The mayor can't afford to have an aide in a town that is 63 percent black making this kind of mistake. I think he did the right thing [accepting the resignation]. Williams sent a message that racial insensitivity won't be tolerated in his administration." (Woodlee)

Even Howard chimed in that the experience offered him a new "awareness" that he hadn't previously had. "I used to think it would be great if we could all be colorblind. That's naive, especially for a white person, because a white person can't afford to be colorblind. They don't have to think about race every day. An African American does" (qtd. in Woodlee). Howard (the Maker), even in creating what appeared to be a completely innocuous representation, had an ethical responsibility toward his audience, which was mostly black and generally without understanding of the meaning and

etymology of the word “niggardly” (which is derived from the Swedish language and is completely unrelated to the Latin origin of the word with which it was confused). This whole situation was further complicated by the fact that Howard was gay, and the acceptance of his resignation drew the ire of yet another group—gay activists who felt threatened and offended by the misrepresentation of Howard and his intentions.

Representational ethics is indeed a complicated web.

Since ethnicity is defined by boundaries and separation from the “mainstream,” all representations of an ethnicity can be seen as acts of authority over that group. As I will outline more fully below, the very heart of Edward Said’s seminal text *Orientalism* is the act of representing the Other—in his case, the Orient. Said argues that the very field of ethnic study is inevitably suspect for this very reason. All representation of ethnicity is really just a projection of the person Mitchell calls the “Maker,” and therefore a barrier to communication (as Mitchell notes). Said argues that ethnic projection, the creation of the Other, reveals more about the maker than it does the represented object.

Givens writes *The Viper on the Hearth* in an effort to identify antagonists’ “drive to render the Mormon radically Other” (135). His thesis leans heavily on Edward Said’s concept of “cultural ‘self-confirmation,’” which “in general ‘is based on a constantly practiced differentiation of itself from what it believes to be not itself’” (Givens 4). Of course, the representational knife cuts both ways: in addition to the ethics with which Said concerns himself—that of the mainstream seeking to define an ethnicity—any group that seeks to define itself as different or separate (an ethnicity) also engages in an act of projection or creation of the “mainstream.” Hence, if a particular group wishes to be ethnic, it falls into the same ethical trap which ensnares those who seek to define others.

Fundamentally, because the process of Orientalism, as Said defines it, relies on an East/West dualism complete with geographical and cultural boundaries, Said's *Orientalism* relies on a sense that difference (including even race and geography) is a social construct:

[The] line separating Occident from Orient, . . . is less a fact of nature than it is a fact of human production, which I have called imaginative geography. . . . the Orient and the Occident are facts produced by human beings, and as such must be studied as integral components of the social, and not the divine or natural, world. ("Orientalism Reconsidered" 90)

Clearly ethics and ethnicity intertwine inextricably in the construction of the Other, and the construction of the Other is the business of representation. If the Other is entirely (or even partially) a construction, the builder must submit to an ethical interrogation. From Said's point of view, then, representing others is always suspect, always a threat to the represented. It is even a kind of violence, or at least violation, on a fundamental level.

In profound contrast to Said's theories are those of Emmanuel Levinas. As detailed below, Levinas sees the construct of other as the grounds for ethics, not a challenge to them. The pillar of his theory of ethics is the primacy of the Other. Ethics begin in the recognition of the other *as* other: "[T]o think the other as other, to think him or her straightaway before affirming oneself, signifies concretely to have goodness" (*Is It Righteous* 106). For Levinas the first great ethical act, then, is to acknowledge difference.

While Levinas and Said clearly write from different philosophical and cultural backgrounds, their biographical paths show striking similarities. Levinas, ethnically and religiously Jewish, nationally a Lithuanian-born Frenchman, spent much of World War II

as a prisoner of war whose father and brothers were murdered by the Nazis in Lithuania. Obviously he comes from the traditions of an oppressed minority, having experienced much of this oppression himself.

Said's cultural and national origins are at least as complex as Levinas'. While born in West Jerusalem, he was raised in Egypt. According to Paul B. Armstrong, while Said's family was Palestinian, his father was an American citizen, and Edward was sent to American schools in Egypt. While part of a dispossessed and oppressed group of people, Said's father ran "by far the largest office equipment and stationery store in the Middle East" (99) and Said's "own youth was privileged: his father's wealth allowed for first-class ocean travel and long stays in suites at the world's best hotels" (99). Said, a staunch defender of Islam, was raised a Christian, and his parents were married in a Baptist church. Even his name exists in a liminal space: "'Edward' was suggested by the Prince of Wales's name, but 'Said' is a pure invention by his father, who chose it to replace the surname 'Ibrahim' for reasons that are not clear to the surviving members of the family" (100).

Both philosophers are qualified as intellectual and cultural elites who come from an oppressed ethnic minority, as both "insiders" and "outsiders" living in two (or more) cultural and ethnic worlds, and as ethical observers and champions. And because of these backgrounds, particularly in their respective religious traditions, both offer ethical arguments powerfully relevant to Mormon issues.

Said argues that the representation of the other is projection and essentially artificial. "Orientalism," as Said uses the term, is a creation of something other—the very concept of the Orient exists only in opposition to the Occident, the West. He states that

“the Orientalist . . . makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West” (*Orientalism* 20-21). The Orientalist fundamentally exercises authority over his subject, the Orient, but “He is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says” (21). In other words, the Orient does not, for practical, poetic, or scholarly purposes, exist outside of his representation of it. In broader terms, the Other derives its significance as a subject from the Maker who represents it, and therefore is entirely a fabrication of the representer. Said’s argument hinges on “representations *as representations*, not as ‘natural’ depictions” of the other (21). There can be, in fact, no “natural depiction” of any other—there is only projection from what Said calls “strategic location” and “strategic formation” (20). These two terms refer to the critic’s “position in a text” with regard to the other—how he approaches that text and the way he chooses texts, analyzes and groups them—and how the critic exploits perceived or created relationships between them to cause his representations to “acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large” (20). All representation, whether scholarly or artistic, has little or nothing to do with what the other as it is, and everything to do with the maker’s critical or political location and agenda. Representation, in the end, is more creation than depiction—the other is not truly “other,” but rather a re-creation of the maker himself, perhaps in a sense a mirror image. Designating something as other, the act of designating an ethnicity (from the outside, at least), is itself unethical, or at least inherently problematic in its ethics.

Contrastively, Levinas states:

The other is not other because he would have other attributes, or would have been born elsewhere or at another moment, or because he would be

of a different race. The other is other because of me: unique and in some manner different than the individual belonging to a genus. It is not difference which makes alterity: alterity makes difference. (*Is It Righteous* 106)

In what appears at first to be a paradox, Levinas states that the first ethical act is to recognize alterity—to understand that the person I face is other than I am. The other is not other because he is inherently different culturally, religiously, or even racially, but simply because he is not me. The other is absolutely other, but only so because of my existence, not because of any real or implied difference between us. To exist is to be other.

For Levinas, to ignore alterity is to assume a cultural sovereignty, to somehow believe that one “understands” the other and thus can represent it responsibly. Such an assumption is, for Levinas, the beginning of irresponsibility and ignorance of ethical obligation. This is perhaps best exemplified by racism, which, for Levinas, opposes completely the recognition of alterity. To express racism is to reject alterity, to avoid “the face of the other” and instead to assign a value as commodity to “things that one would possess or reject” (*Is It Righteous* 111). The other has value not as other, but only in relation to the self. This fundamental failure to recognize the essential alterity of the individual one faces assumes that value depends on the self.

These two radical concepts, Said’s fabrication of and Levinas’ acknowledgment of the Other, seem at odds, because Said’s “othering” is culturally violent and Levinas’ recognition of ontological alterity forms the basis of ethical responsibility for and obligation toward others. For Said the very concept of other is a weapon; for Levinas it is

a gift and the very essence of Being. But both theoretical frameworks lead the ethical reader to an acknowledgment of the Self, that one has a responsibility to acknowledge the other as something entirely different. While they differ significantly in their approaches to alterity, Said (and Givens) and Levinas converge in their declarations that recognition or acknowledgment of difference, of alterity, is not to be superficial or reductive. In both cases, the other is in the eyes of the beholder, but the ethical implications and consequences of the alterity, perceived or constructed, are radically different.

Some of the apparent differences between Said and Levinas can also be understood and reconciled by their attitude toward the process of classification. For Said the creation of the Other is an act of classification, for Levinas the acknowledgment of alterity resists classification. At a simple level, it is a matter of Other (Said) vs. Others (Levinas). Taxonomy itself, born of Enlightenment desire to understand and know the Other, desires to group things and people together. For Said, this is violence. I argue that Levinas would see it similarly, but perhaps for different reasons—the other person ceases to be truly other when classified, for this act of “understanding” is a denial of complete alterity—if the observer can classify, then the observer “grasps” (accepting the implied violence of the term) the object. The first act of ethics, for Levinas, is the recognition that the observed constantly and inherently eludes the grasp of the observer in a truly fundamental way. In both cases, the violence inheres, in a sense, in the grouping of the individual with its “type.” For Levinas, Otherness is individuality. One example of the violence inherent in classification is the caste system practiced overtly in various countries, cultures, and religious traditions throughout the world. Such a system denies

fundamental individuality while sorting people into classified orders which then delimit the social, economic, and cultural opportunities and status of those people.

In arguing the problematic nature of ethnicity as an intellectual construct, Said questions the very act of classification, all the way back to Linnaeus and the taxonomic desire to classify, which he describes as a process by which the very “materiality of an object” would be objectified, named, and categorized neatly, and thus “transformed” from “spectacle” (something merely “seen”) to “the precise measurement of characteristic elements” (*Orientalism* 119). Said describes the process of scientific and more specifically anthropological classification as looking for difference in an object, to provide a basis for the taxonomy, for the naming of that object. In other words, the observer was “seeing” (projecting) difference into an object so that he could then form “a network of related generalizations” (*Orientalism* 119), facilitating use (or abuse) of the objects in question. The objectivity of empiricism is thus linked to objectification. What was applied to physical nature is applied socially by Jacobson who, echoing Said, roots “scientific inquiry . . . in the politics and practices of white supremacy,” which naturally caused the scientific classifications “to ratify the profound separation of whiteness from nonwhiteness” (36). The classification does not reside in the observed, only in the observer. Ironically, the very purpose of seeking for difference is to have the power to generalize, most broadly in the difference between “us” and “them.” In an ethnographic vicious circle, the process of objectification itself grants the classifier the “objectivity” of a disinterested third party “observer,” one who can speak authoritatively.

For Givens, peculiarity, relative geographic as well as cultural isolation, and language (or alphabet at least, in Mormons’ case) all contribute to a sense of Mormon

ethnicity. Said reverses this equation: understanding is accomplished in generalization; therefore the desire to classify or exercise power over a subject creates ethnic categories. Such categories, then, are a result of, rather than a cause or evidence of, ethnicity. For Said this is true even of physiology, where

we find character-as-designation appearing as physiological-moral classification: there are, for example, the wild men, the Europeans, the Asiatics, and so forth. . . . Physiological and moral characteristics are distributed more or less equally: the American is “red, choleric, erect,” the Asiatic is “yellow, melancholy, rigid,” the African is “black, phlegmatic, lax.” But such designations gather power when, later in the nineteenth century, they are allied with character as derivation, as genetic type.

*(Orientalism 119)*

Such a philosophical stance, that observation is projection, and that the “observed” characteristics grant power to the observer, is necessary for Said’s thesis that alterity is, in virtually every way, an intellectual and social construct. That there may be real physiological differences is almost insignificant in a sense, because ethnicity totalizes in an effort to “*articulate* the East, making the Orient deliver up its secrets under the learned authority” (*Orientalism 138*) of the scientist—the philologist, the ethnographer, even the travel writer, whose authority in the nineteenth century was seen as scientific in nature.

For Said, then, ethnicity is imposed, not inherent. One can only make broad generalizations or classifications when one assumes one’s own group as a fixed foundation. If there is an “other,” there must first be “us.” Such ethnocentricity is not

unique to European Enlightenment civilization. Sollors lists numerous American Indian examples of “calling themselves ‘people’ and calling others less flattering things”:

The name Kiowa means “real or principal people”; Lenno-Lenapes are “original men” and Algonquins “people of the other side.” The name Apache means “enemy” in Zuñi. According to Keith Wilbur, the Algonquian meaning of other Indian names is striking: Iroquois “real adders,” Mingo “treacherous,” Mohawk “cannibals or cowards,” and Pequot “destroyers.” Many names are frozen curses. (*Beyond Ethnicity* 27)

As mentioned previously, the name “Mormon” was originally meant as an insult of sorts. To name is to gain power over, to control the other.

In an interesting counter-move, many ethnic groups have exercised their own power in accepting and appropriating the names as badges of honor. The epithet “Yankees” was accepted with pride by American revolutionaries, and the application of “Mormon” to the Latter-day Saints was embraced by the Church’s Prophet Joseph Smith and remains an acceptable term among members of the Church. Ethnic self-designation involves voluntary separation as a power move against mainstream society (which itself becomes “other” whenever a group establishes itself as an ethnicity). Parallel to such a move is the embrace and appropriation of the name imposed. Ethnicities accept such imposed names because the process of naming, however pejorative and culturally violent its origin, implies acceptance of a group’s status as other and ethnic, an often prized status.

For Levinas the concepts of ethnicity are essential to being other and to responsibility for the Other. In fact, he argues that “The responsibility for the other is the

originary place of identification” (*Is It Righteous* 110). In other words, “otherness” is inherent to all identity. The first way of understanding man’s identity is as a being particular in all the categories to which he belongs: “nation, profession, race, place and date of birth, etc.” (*Is It Righteous* 110). This first way is not complete until, Levinas argues, an “individuation” occurs, and one separates an individual from these categories; but still the categories, the elements of what we call ethnicity, are an essential part of Levinas’ “identity of man.” Identity, established in otherness, then becomes complete when it becomes individual—when a person, grounded in ethnicity, becomes, in literary terms, a rounded character.

Defining Mormons as an ethnic group is problematic. It grants Mormons the power of ethnicity and yet the very definition, according to Said, names, categorizes and commodifies Mormons for literary or perhaps anthropological “use.” As we have discussed, the interpretation of Mormonism as an ethnic group has long departed the realm of the pejorative (even by Said’s standards) and moved on to become a desirable classification. Ethnicity is power, privilege, and protection. Michael Austin, in his important paper “The Function of Mormon Literary Criticism at the Present Time,” offers an ethnic reading of Mormonism and Mormon literature, and proposes that there is more to Mormonism, at least in its literature, than “mere” religion:

[W]e must concede that Mormonism is something more than a religion as the term is usually understood. . . . imbedded in the assertion that there is such a thing as “Mormon literature” is the claim that we, as Mormons, and particularly as American Mormons, represent a cultural entity whose traditions, heritage, and experience deserve to be considered a vital part of

the American mosaic. We are claiming, not just that we are Mormons, but that we are “Mormo-Americans,” that “Mormo-American literature” should be considered an important part of American literary studies, and that anyone who doesn't think we deserve our own place in the canon is a “Mormophobe” whose position should not be taken seriously by an academy that values tolerance, difference, and diversity. (8)

Austin doesn't employ the term “ethnicity” to describe Mormons here, but this is clearly, by the definitions used above, what he means. To emphasize his point he goes on to compare Mormons to African-Americans and feminists (9). The implicit power of such an assertion comes from its declaration that Mormons matter in the same way that women, African Americans, Jewish Americans, and other minority or ethnic groups matter.

If one accepts such an assertion, as both Mormon critics and critics of Mormons generally have, then the next natural move is to accept that representations of Mormons matter also. Wayne Booth dedicates his work on the ethics of fiction, *The Company We Keep*, to Paul Moses, a fellow teacher and critic at the University of Chicago. In a faculty discussion of which texts should be taught to incoming students, Moses,

an assistant professor of art, committed what in that context seemed an outrage: an overt, serious, uncompromising act of ethical criticism . . . “I simply can't teach Huckleberry Finn again. The way Mark Twain portrays Jim is so offensive to me that I get angry in class, and I can't get all those liberal white kids to understand why I am angry. What's more, I don't

think it's right to subject students, black or white, to the many distorted views of race on which that book is based." (3)

Booth uses this anecdote, which occurred in the 1960s, to begin the introduction to his book, a section titled "Ethical Criticism, a Banned Discipline?" The significance of the story lies, for Booth, not so much in the event itself or the propriety of teaching *Huckleberry Finn*, but rather in the strangeness of such an assertion at that time from a serious scholar. "All of his colleagues were offended: obviously Moses was violating academic norms of objectivity" (3). Booth asserts that "Moses's reading of *Huckleberry Finn*, an overt ethical appraisal, is one legitimate form of literary criticism. . . . if the powerful stories we tell each other really matter to us—and even the most skeptical theorists imply by their *practice* that stories do matter—then a criticism that takes their 'mattering' seriously cannot be ignored" (4). Booth goes on in the book to demonstrate ably and amply that "some fictions are worth more than others" (36) and he calls ethics "the most important of all forms of criticism" (44). It may well be that such assertions are patently obvious to critics now, since many of today's dominant critical fields have at their core such ethical questions as Booth raises.

As for the importance of ethical criticism, Booth offers a set of questions to interrogate the ethics of both author and reader, asking variations on the theme, "What are the Author's/Reader's Responsibilities?" (126-132). Feminism, African-American studies, Gay and Lesbian studies, Post-colonial studies, Jewish studies, and so on—all ask forms of this same question: what are our responsibilities as writers, readers, or critics? These questions represent an effort to find specific application—to codify the ethical interrogation suggested by Levinas and Said. They ask individuals to examine

carefully their relationship to the Other and evaluate their corresponding responsibilities. As Mitchell demonstrates, these ethical questions are inherently matters of representation. For minority groups, in fact, a central component of responsibility is the degree and manner in which ethnicity is represented. The critic offers a qualitative judgment on the text: “This isn’t Black/Jewish/Mormon *enough*.” An excellent example of this in Mormon studies is the exchange between Richard Cracroft, Bruce Jorgensen, and Gideon Burton regarding what is essentially Mormon literature in their addresses to the Association for Mormon Letters. The debate, gracious but pointed, centers on how “Mormon” a text should be before it could truly (“essentially”) be considered Mormon literature.

Cracroft argues for the essentialist viewpoint: that some combination of elements must be present in order for a literature to be sufficiently Mormon to be classified as such. Jorgensen takes a more open view, arguing for more “hospitality” in embracing writers and texts which Cracroft considers outside the pale of Mormonism, at least in a literary sense. Burton attempts to reconcile the two viewpoints, arguing for a literary tradition with deep Mormon roots but with a willingness to examine and embrace new expressions growing out of those roots—a sort of literary cross-pollination with traditions outside the Mormon realm.

I agree with Booth that ethics is not only important but that it is, in fact, inescapable as it informs virtually all other fields of critical theory, even the most formal. I argue that the ethnicity of the LDS Church, both in its adherents’ views of themselves and as seen and represented by others, means that those who represent Mormonism have a substantial ethical responsibility, the same as they have in representing any other ethnic

group. I do not suggest, in making this argument, that serious works including Mormon major characters will necessarily focus overtly on “Mormon ethnicity.” In fact, most do not. But if “fairness” is, in fact, an issue for “serious” writers who wish to take Latter-day Saints “seriously,” then they must grapple with this ethnicity, because it will play a part in how texts are read and perceived and the effects they have on readers, both LDS and non-members.

Mormons often feel that their worry over others’ impressions of the LDS community and religion exceeds other religions’ or ethnicities’ similar anxieties. One of my faculty advisors mentioned the anxiety Mormons feel over how they are seen by others as in some way unique to the LDS community. When I brought the subject up in a recent class discussion (with a different professor), laughter and knowing smiles followed, the general consensus being that “we” (all class members, to my knowledge, were Mormon, as was the professor) as a people are in some sense paranoid or at least very anxious to be seen in a certain way. Such anxiety, even as expressed in informal discussions in academic or other settings, naturally becomes a fundamental issue for any discussion of what it means to be “fair” in representing any community.

I do not argue that Mormons’ anxiety over their representation, by those inside or outside of the faith, is unique. Certainly virtually all ethnic groups, by definition, have a vested interest in their perception as other from mainstream society, whether that alterity is projected by others or self-imposed. But there are unique elements to religious ethnicity. Religious groups traditionally see themselves as separate even before they are seen as such by others. If they see themselves as distinct enough, they tend to, as mentioned above, seek out a separate space—spiritually and, probably more important in

ethnic arguments, geographically. Unlike race or gender, religious ethnicities within the Judeo-Christian tradition, like Mormonism, often see themselves as “chosen,” which creates a whole new set of ethnic and ethical problems with the projection of others’ status as “gentiles” or at least “not chosen.”

Some of Mormons’ representational anxiety grows out of past persecution. Mormons have been persecuted and driven from numerous locations, with much loss of property and life; contemporary persecution, real or perceived, sparks the communal memory of those times. Latter-day Saints naturally would want to avoid any recurrence of such injustices, in whatever form. One does not have to look hard to find parallels between this anxiety and that of groups like the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith and the NAACP. Mormon vigilance in identifying and calling attention to misrepresentations, particularly examples that echo those that spurred violence against Church members in past times, is certainly understandable.

Perhaps some of the anxiety stems from the Church’s aggressive missionary program. Mormons want to be seen in a positive light because such good impressions “open doors” for the missionaries, giving them opportunities to share the Church’s message with the world. Negative impressions or simple misrepresentations can cause confusion at least, and sometimes fear and dislike. The murder mystery movie *Witness*, set in an Amish community, was shown on Portuguese television prior to my Mormon missionary service there. In the Portuguese subtitles the word “Amish” was mistranslated as “Mormon,” causing much confusion, both for those familiar and unacquainted with the LDS Church.

This kind of anxiety—related to proselytizing efforts—is, in my experience, almost entirely unique to Latter-day Saints as an ethnicity. African-Americans, with the NAACP and other organizations, do not worry about recruiting others to join them, nor do Jews proselytize, nor do women try to convert men to their gender. There are certainly groups, other religions specifically, which do recruit, but of major proselytizing faiths, at least in the United States, Latter-day Saints are unique, as Austin argues, in their ethnic make-up and culture.

Both contributing to and deriving from this uniqueness is the very real threat that Mormonism poses to other religions and ethnicities. Part of the anxiety toward Mormonism is the fact that it *is* an ethnicity, and other ethnicities, racial and cultural as well as religious, feel threatened by “conversion” to Mormonism. If an African-American converts to Mormonism, what does he give up? Certainly other religious traditions have this anxiety, but so do races and cultures have a fear of Mormon uniformity.

This deep concern over what others think of Latter-day Saints is sometimes interpreted as evidence of an inferiority complex, similar to such complexes among other ethnicities. Mormons must feel inadequate, the logic goes, to worry so much about what other people think about them. At some level one finds such anxiety ironic, since another impression Mormons often give is that of self-righteousness. There is an old joke about a man who dies and is greeted at heaven’s gate by Peter, who escorts him through heaven toward his final mansion. At one point the two pass an area blocked from view by a high wall. As they walk near the wall Peter tells the man to keep quiet. Once out of earshot of whatever might be within the walled-off area, the man asks Peter who is in there and why they must keep quiet when passing the wall. Peter responds, “Oh, that’s the Mormons.

They think they're the only ones here." Another old "heaven" joke has a few people dead of gunshots. The Mormon man proclaims to have been shot more times than the others.

The punch line? "Those Mormons: always 'holier than thou.'"

According to Mauss, at least some of the anxiety almost certainly stems, as it does in most new revolutionary sects, from "the upward social mobility and growing affluence of the later generations of sectarians, who find the religious zeal of their ancestors primitive and unsophisticated" (26). Certainly the desire shown in places like famousmormons.net to showcase the "big-name" Mormons (and to prove, mostly to Latter-day Saints themselves, that they are just as good as everyone else) testifies to this influence.

Mauss wrote in 1994 that, in contrast to early Latter-day Saints, who sought for a place of relative isolation where they could live apart from the world,

American Mormons of today are . . . engaged in a different kind of "quest" from the one that launched Mormonism as a new religion . . . Today's quest is for a different kind of refuge, a more psychological one, in the form of a new *identity*. This quest is still very much in progress, and the identity is not yet fully articulated. Exactly what does it mean to be Mormon in America today? . . . Just how "American" can a Mormon be without appearing to be just like all the other Americans (and without undermining the identity that he or she presumably shares with the world's three million *non-American* Mormons)? (25).

I believe that two powerful cross-currents mainly drive today's Mormons' image anxiety: on the one hand, today's Mormons, in contrast to "the early Mormons, who sought for the

rest of the world's assimilation into their new Kingdom of God, not vice versa" (Mauss 25), pull out all the stops in PR blitzes, advertisements, and so on, both official and unofficial, in an effort to prove that they are an integral part of society at large—in most senses, they are just like everyone else. Doctrinal differences and some (though certainly not all) of the profoundly challenging theological underpinnings of the faith are often deemphasized in what might be described as a new ecumenism. Indeed, the LDS Church's movement seems to follow precisely Mauss's description of "a transition from high tension to low tension with the host society" (26).

On the other hand, since the 1950s there has been what Mauss calls a "retrenchment" movement in the Church which has moved it in a much less assimilating direction, toward a more conservative and even "fundamentalist" position in modern culture. Mauss attributes this to change in Church leadership and to the "Age of Aquarius during the 1960s and 1970s" which "wreaked havoc with traditional values and norms governing the sexual and family practices of the nation" (35). In contrast to "Nearly all the 'mainline' religious denominations [which] have been more accommodating than resistant to these changes" (35), "It is as though the Mormon leadership has decided that assimilation has gone far enough and that Mormonism is in danger of losing its special identity and mission" (36).

I argue that the LDS Church today is moving more in the direction with which Mauss associates it in the early twentieth century—to a broader and deeper engagement with the "outside world," religiously, intellectually, and culturally. While, as Mauss describes, there are still many lawyers and businessmen among the Church's highest levels of leadership, one also counts four former university presidents, a heart surgeon,

and a nuclear engineer among the Church's quorum of the twelve apostles, with another career educator apostle recently passed away. Current Church President Gordon B. Hinckley—with his numerous interviews, press conferences, and published writings aimed at the world at large—has been, without question, the most press-friendly prophet of the twentieth century, and probably in the history of the Church. He has been recognized and received awards by numerous secular organizations, including non-Mormon universities and the NAACP. The Church hired an impressive Public Relations firm from New York City to help improve its image and changed the official logo of its name to more prominently feature “Jesus Christ.” Books like *How Wide the Divide*, by Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, have sought to build bridges with evangelical Christianity, Salt Lake City sought after and obtained the 2002 Winter Olympics (with some definitely “worldly” bribery), and scholars at the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Study (FARMS) have widened the intellectual horizons of faithful LDS scholarship. The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, published by secular MacMillan in cooperation with the Church and many of its scholars, represents an effort to place accurate information in a major reference. The “Worlds of Joseph Smith” conference, held at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, involving scholars from both in and outside the Church, and Columbia professor (and practicing Latter-day Saint) Richard L. Bushman’s warmly-received cultural biography of Joseph Smith, *Rough Stone Rolling*, all represent a great era of intellectual engagement by the Church.

Indeed, historian Benjamin McArthur describes a historical tradition in which, in times past, “Outsiders such as Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, or Mormons—whose histories marked an embarrassing departure from the civilizing mission and ecumenical

spirit of mainstream Protestantism--were slighted by earlier Church historians wishing to hide any fruitcakes in the family tree” (378). Now, McArthur says,

if America's religious outsider groups were once relegated to the historiographical backwaters that is no longer the case. Indeed, Martin Marty in a survey of 1980s scholarship on American religion observed that the “margins have moved to the historians' center”; Mormons have displaced Methodists and Shakers dislodged Presbyterians in the scholarly imagination. (378)

He goes on to describe “Traditional Mormon history” as “highly polemical,” but it “gradually gave way to a more secular set of standards, culminating in the ‘New Mormon history’ . . . of such scholars as Leonard Arrington and Richard Bushman, who employ the profession's accepted historical tools in approaching their church's history” (379). All these evidences suggest an intellectual openness relatively unknown in most of the past century.

If Mormons qualify, as Austin asserts (and I concord), for a “place in the canon” as “an important part of American literary studies,” and if those who challenge such a qualification are “Mormophobes” (8), then a new door opens up in the corridor of Mormon anxiety: is it possible that hand-wringing over Mormon anxiety is itself greater evidence of the anxiety than the source of anxiety itself? In other words, are Mormons, and Mormon academics specifically, worried about what others think of a problem that isn't really a substantial problem itself? Do African-American scholars worry greatly about other people ridiculing African-Americans for being defensive about how they are seen by other people? When the Anti-Defamation League protests over the negative

portrayal of Jews in literature, film, television, or any other art form, do scholars feel some sort of anxiety or embarrassment? Perhaps, but this has not been, in my experience, common. The dominant voices in these fields are those “defending their turf.” If Mormons are indeed eligible to be treated just as seriously as any of those other fields of study, with all their ethical assertions and implications, perhaps the truly unique aspect of the Mormon anxiety of representation is, ironically, that anyone worries about it at all. If Latter-day Saints have truly “arrived” critically, they need not apologize for their critical presence, nor its ethical implications. They have no more need to make excuses for themselves than any of a host of feminist, Jewish, post-colonial, Catholic, or gay and lesbian scholars. One can certainly argue against the positions these defenders take, but no one discounts their right to engage in serious ethical criticism.

A couple of examples here illustrate the point that Mormons, as an ethnicity, have a right to engage in ethical criticism. Recently the actor and comedian Michael Richards has been excoriated for his racist tirade against some black men who were heckling him during a stand-up routine in Los Angeles. He used the “N-word” multiple times, as well as making offensive statements regarding slavery and abuse of African-Americans. The owner of the club, Paul Rodriguez (himself a comedian) stated, “Once the word comes out of your mouth and you don't happen to be African American, then you have a whole lot of explaining” (Farhi). While there are doubtless many African-Americans who are deeply offended by black people who use the “N-word” and speak derogatorily about their race, clearly there is a far greater tolerance, if not an obvious “right,” that members of that race and culture have to say things that would be troubling, to say the least, coming from white people or other ethnicities (another good example would be Mel

Brooks or many other Jewish comedians making comic hay from their own people, while the same ridicule from others may well bring the wrath of the Anti-Defamation League swiftly down on them). You may disagree with the premise that African-Americans may use the N-word while others may not, but you will probably not claim that African-Americans should not ever be offended by such “representations” (as the use of the N-word is).

One pop-culture example of the dual reaction to Mormon-mocking comes from the Mormon film *The Singles Ward*. Most of the jokes in the movie are made at the expense of Mormons and their quirks. But when the main character, an aspiring stand-up comedian himself, starts to use his Mormon material to get laughs from non-Mormons, his leading lady jettisons him like old garbage (at least until he repents).

In the following chapters I will explore more literary examples of the use of stereotypes in portraying Mormons and examine the ethical implications of those stereotypes and how reactions (especially by Mormons) to their portrayals have affected each author’s desire to continue to write about Mormons. In one way or another, Bayard Taylor, Maureen Whipple, and Walter Kirn all backpedaled from their writings of Mormonism. The real-world reactions in each case stung enough to prevent them from exploring the Mormon question more than they otherwise might have. In each situation can be seen both sides of the “responsibility” questions Booth raises: the responsibilities of authors and the responsibilities of readers, and how their readings and reactions have real consequences in people’s actual lives.

In both literary and popular examples, one could make a case that a particular representation is or is not offensive. But there is no need for anyone, Mormon or

otherwise, to worry about whether Mormons have a right to be offended in a critical or literary sense, or to worry about the ethical “effects” of such representations. Booth quotes David Hume saying,

But where the ideas of morality and decency alter from one age to another, and where vicious manners are described, without being marked with the proper characters of blame and disapprobation, they must be allowed to [i.e., we must agree that they] disfigure the poem, and to be a real deformity. I cannot, nor is it proper I should, enter into such sentiments, and however I may excuse the poet, on account of the manners of his age, I can never relish the composition. (382)

Booth goes to great and effective lengths to demonstrate that opprobrious sensitivities in literature can and do quite definitely mar the work itself, even in aesthetic terms. As feasters at the critical table, Mormons have every right to assert that a particular text is “bad” because of the damage it potentially does as a representation of their culture.

Gideon Burton and Neal Kramer, in discussing the importance of Signature Press as a publisher of Mormon-themed texts, write that

Its more liberal editorial policies have made possible publication of works of a high literary quality, but such policies by no means guarantee literary quality, and can, in fact, prove very narrowly liberal . . . The publisher’s liberal reputation has estranged not only mainstream LDS audiences but many authors and academics uncomfortable with the ways LDS leaders and culture are not respected in some Signature titles. (7)

In the past, such a statement would likely have caused “serious” Mormon studies scholars to scoff at using “respect for LDS leaders and culture” as a criterion for literary evaluation. But Mormon scholars can and should read this statement without anxiety that Mormons are too worried about what others think of themselves.

This is not to say, of course, that Mormons now have a right to be, as Michael Austin describes, “victim-status seekers”: “I do not believe that Mormons do, or should, qualify as an oppressed minority, that we should receive preferential treatment, or that every descendent of a Haun's Mill victim deserves forty acres and a mule. Such arguments would appeal to the worst element of the multicultural movement” (31). But Latter-day Saints do have a right to unapologetically argue about what true diversity is and does, particularly as it relates to them and their traditions and culture. Such arguments suggest a maturing of Mormon criticism.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to determine what a Mormon ethics would look like, but we can get a few hints from the late Eugene England: “Ethical fiction, I believe, . . . gives the Devil his due, brings opposites together metaphorically, and thus makes more possible what I believe to be the greatest single ethical ideal—that, as Mammy Brewer puts it, ‘all the world ought to be friends’” (14). England quotes Joseph Smith’s statement that

“By proving contraries, truth is made manifest.” By “prove” he did not mean to provide a final proof of one or the other contrary, but to test, to try out, to examine both alternatives, or all, in the light of each other; he meant that truth is not found in extremes, in choosing one polar opposite over another, but in seeing what emerges from careful, tolerant study of

the dialectic between the two. Ethical fiction brings the great contraries into juxtaposition and moves us to new visions of truth greater than any of the poles. (14)

England's is a good contribution to the discussion, and it illustrates, along with Austin's comments, that Mormons do not deserve the head of the literary table, nor the foot, but they do deserve a seat where they can fight their way into the discussion. And Mormons can and should expect their treatment in the hands of serious writers to be ethically sensitive and responsible.

Chapter Two - Bayard Taylor's *The Prophet* and the Nineteenth Century

Mormons in nineteenth-century fiction generally fit into Lambert's two main categories of representation: "When the Mormon antagonist was not sly, dark, and seductive, he was usually fat, boorish, and uncouth" (65). In one fictional example, a polygamist husband was depicted as "squat bodied, sluggish, gross. . . . [He] had a flat toad-like look as he sat lazily drooping forward with elbows on his knees and occasionally turning a pair of small reddish eyes about the landscape" (qtd. in Lambert, 65). "Of course, the arch villains of the stereotype are Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. Their representation runs the full spectrum from drunken bumkin [sic] to mysterious seducer" (64-65). As Givens and also Bunker and Bitton (in terms of the graphic image) show, antagonistic, stereotypical, bigoted portrayals of Mormons by non-Mormon "hack" writers were not just common, they were the norm. Among major literary figures of the day (excepting non-fiction travel writing by figures like Mark Twain and Richard Burton), "Mormonism was not simply ignored by America's greatest writers . . . but rather was consciously avoided" (Schwartz, Thesis 236). Mormons were considered, as Henry James' statement in the Introduction above demonstrates, "inherently vulgar" (qtd. in Mordell 236), and certainly unworthy of more serious treatment by literary writers.

Bayard Taylor's choice of Mormonism as the subject for one of his major writing projects, as early as 1867 or perhaps even 1862, stands out in sharp contrast to these examples. Taylor's *The Prophet: A Tragedy* makes an attempt to treat the subject of Mormonism as a subject for serious fictional literature, even what he thought would be his most important work. Such an effort has no significant precedent outside of Mormon writers. Taylor, considered a serious writer in his day, chose Mormonism as the vehicle

to address what he considered to be troublesome trends in Christianity: “the heresy of orthodoxy” and “paying too close attention to the scripture” (Schwartz, Thesis 236). He manipulated the early history of the LDS Church to fit his broader purposes, and he was guilty of a measure of sensationalism, particularly in projecting the Orient (with its accompanying fears and fantasies) onto Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and Mormonism. Hence, Taylor was not entirely free from American cultural anxieties regarding Mormonism, nor from their stereotypes, especially as employed by popular writers of the day. But in *The Prophet* Taylor leads all non-Mormon writers in the seriousness with which he treats Mormons and their history. He demonstrates a remarkably even and sympathetic hand, especially for his era, in representing Mormonism and Mormons—particularly Joseph Smith. And he chooses a form and style that, by their very nature, lend a definite *gravitas* to the subject.

Part of the reason *The Prophet*, though virtually forgotten today, remains important in the history of Mormon representation is the reputation of Taylor at the time he wrote the poetic drama. Taylor was, in his day, fairly well respected, if often considered only fair in most of his writing. Schwartz describes him as “a highly regarded man of letters” during his heyday in the 1870s and 1880s, whose reputation came primarily from a particularly good translation of Goethe’s *Faust* and the breadth of his writing attempts, rather than the depth of any one. Taylor counted as friends Twain, Howells, Longfellow, Holmes, Whittier, and Bryant (*BYU Studies* 236). Richmond Croom Beatty, writing in 1936, subtitles his biography of Taylor “Laureate of the Gilded Age,” which title Schwartz calls “dubious,” since “Like the age, his aspirations were high but his talents limited” (236). Though Beatty expresses frustration at his inability to

answer the question of whether “Taylor was, irretrievably, a second-rate artist, or . . . a great artist frustrated by the American way of life” (ix), he also laments “that the once widely esteemed writings of Bayard Taylor are now almost completely forgotten” (vii). While Taylor cannot be described as among the top tier of literary writers, he was certainly well-connected, respected, and held to high literary standards by his critics.

Additional evidence that Taylor had at least some literary standing is found, somewhat ironically, in Henry James’ withering critique of *The Prophet*. James focuses not so much on Taylor’s technical ability (which is acknowledged, if not heavily praised) as on his choice of what James considered a ridiculous subject—Mormonism. James clearly considered Taylor a serious enough writer that the subject of Mormonism—not uncommon among popular, more sensational writers—was beneath him. Taylor, according to James, should have had much higher standards. Obviously Taylor’s reputation would not have suffered by his association with Mormonism if he hadn’t had a significant literary reputation to begin with. His popularity, though by his own admission “of a cheap, ephemeral sort” (qtd. in Hansen-Taylor, 638), along with this literary reputation, likely fed his substantial ego and ambition. And his ambition may have helped inspire him to declare of *The Prophet* what he characteristically declared of almost all his “major” works: “The poem is by far the best thing I have ever written” (qtd. in Hansen-Taylor, 638). His literary reputation and self-perception, coupled with his ego and ambition, are important to the ethics of *The Prophet*. He certainly considered his own work to be making important contributions to the literature of the era, and so his choice of subject was indeed forward ethical progress in the history of Mormon representation.

*The Prophet: A Tragedy* is a dramatic poem in five acts, written in blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter). It loosely follows the origins and early history of Joseph Smith and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In Act I we are introduced to David Starr (Taylor's Joseph Smith character), his parents, Elkanah and Hannah, and his future (first) wife, Rhoda. David is a spiritually-oriented young man who, like Joseph Smith, seeks some kind of religion by means of camp meetings, whose preachers he finds hypocritical. Not finding the spiritual fulfillment he seeks, he goes off into "A wild, rocky valley between hills covered with forests" (22), with no food (fasting), where he has a "visionary" experience. There, while fasting, Rhoda brings him food but leaves it without revealing herself, and David takes this as a sign from God of his prophethood. Here also David first meets Nimrod Kraft, Taylor's Brigham Young character, who sees in David a prophet-figure whose will can be built up with Nimrod's "coarser strength" (27). David accepts the call and preaches to a group which, when a stone falls during David's speech, accept him as a prophet. Nimrod becomes David's right-hand man.

In Act II David and his followers establish their city of Zion and we are introduced to Livia Romney, who is enthralled by David and begins insinuating herself into his inner circle. Nimrod at this time has become a manipulator who uses his status with David to accomplish his own ends: "The words I spake were but the Prophet's unpronounced desires. / I am the nearest yet, because I keep / A circle round him clear and unprofaned, / That so his soul be tempered to receive continued revelations" (59). Here Nimrod cements his power over both the people, as spokesman for the Prophet; and, as the doorman who controls who may speak with him, over David Starr.

Act III finds the temple almost completed. At this point Nimrod (not David Starr) first explicitly introduces the idea of polygamy to the church, first by way of David's servant Peter, who has affection for two women. When David broaches the subject with Rhoda she panics and reveals to him that she was the one who brought him the food in his wilderness experience, causing David serious doubts about his prophetic call. He goes to the temple, where Livia praises him and herself suggests "spiritual wifery," reinforces David's identity as prophet, and lures him to kiss her repeatedly.

In Act IV the temple is dedicated and the ark placed in it. Some of the Council of the Twelve, disillusioned by developments in the church, ally with Colonel Hyde, local sheriff, to arrest the prophet. Act V includes the final battle as David's followers arm themselves to defend their prophet. David and Rhoda reminisce one last time, then, after learning of the battle to protect him and seeing his wounded servant Peter, David rushes to the heat of the battle, where he is mortally wounded. Brought back into the temple, David dies and Nimrod snatches the ark from the temple's altar and flees, to build Zion elsewhere.

Not surprisingly, given Taylor's translation of Goethe's text, there are definite Faustian and Romantic elements in *The Prophet*, particularly in the character David Starr. I will discuss these elements further below, as evidence of the seriousness with which Taylor treated Mormonism as a subject.

*The Prophet* has disappeared almost completely from consideration by readers today, even among most critics of Mormon literature (remarkably, Terryl Givens fails to make even passing mention of *The Prophet* in *The Viper on the Hearth*). Taylor himself completely disavowed the subject and wished to forget the text overall after it was poorly

received by critics in his day. These facts seem to suggest that Taylor failed in his intentions to create his greatest work.<sup>1</sup> Taylor's literary failure seems to stem, at least in part, from an inability to navigate between Henry James' and Harold Bloom's statements on the possibilities of Mormonism as literary subject. While the subject may very well be, as Bloom describes, above all else in American history as "epic . . . *materia poetica*," no one will ever compose that epic while holding, however unconsciously, to James' belief that Mormonism is "inherently vulgar . . . to which no varnish will give a gloss." Taylor seems to do both at the same time, the former consciously, the latter unintentionally.

In ethical terms, while Taylor takes the first significant step forward in representing Mormons, *The Prophet* is not without significant problems. Referring to Mitchell's representational diamond, Taylor, as Maker, has a responsibility not just to the Beholder but, probably most important to this project, to the represented—Mormons and Mormonism. In writing about the Mormons Taylor is clearly sensitive to issues of representation, since he deliberately avoids referring explicitly to Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, or Mormonism. This oblique representation circumvents the cultural baggage then attached to Mormonism. Taylor seems to anticipate (rightly) the problems American culture would have with his choosing Mormonism as a subject for a serious tragedy.

Whatever the reason for the thinly disguised treatment of Mormonism, explicit or implied, Taylor cannot remove himself from ethical responsibility in portraying Mormons. In addition to Taylor's overt description of Joseph Smith and Mormonism as

---

<sup>1</sup> One discerning reviewer, Leon H. Vincent, describes the work as "a courageous dramatic experiment [which] will always be read with curiosity if not with pleasure" (413), missing the mark only with the word "always."

the subject for this work in letters to colleagues, every critic who responded to the text after the fact clearly saw Mormonism as the story of *The Prophet*.

In historical terms, the text maintains the basic outline of the rise of the LDS Church. David Starr, like Joseph Smith, is a seeker who attends local religious camp meetings in which he is called to repent and confess his faith, which opportunities he rejects, seeking a more personal, private experience with the Divine. He goes off into a forest setting where he experiences something “visionary” (though what that might be, other than the apparently [to David] magical appearance of food, is absent). Starr accepts his prophetic calling, organizes a council of twelve apostles, and establishes a Nauvoo-type city, complete with temple. Polygamy is introduced and this, among other things, stirs up some followers who bring the law to bear against Starr. The story climaxes with a gun battle in which Starr is mortally wounded, and Nimrod (Brigham Young) flees.

But there are serious inaccuracies as well, most related to Taylor’s desire to make his Joseph Smith character, David Starr, tragic in the classical sense. Polygamy is introduced overtly by Nimrod Kraft and suggested by Livia Romney (who has no counterpart in actual Mormon history). David Starr is more a pawn than an instigator of this practice. Thus Nimrod and Livia are the main villains of the story for damaging David’s marriage, morally bankrupting the prophet, and producing the schism in the church that results in the killing of David Starr. When Nimrod grabs the ark from the temple’s altar and flees, there is no doubt as to who the bad guy of the story has always been.

More problematic still is Taylor’s removal of the fantastic materiality of Mormonism’s genesis. Joseph Smith, in the official LDS scriptural account of his First

Vision, describes “the power of some actual being from the unseen world” attempting to destroy him as he attempted to pray, which power was dispelled when “a pillar of light” appeared, in which he saw “two Personages” who declared themselves to be, in no uncertain terms, God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ (Joseph Smith-History 1:15-17). In his effort to universalize the story, to broaden its application to Christianity in general, Taylor strips out the theophany of Joseph Smith’s First Vision, reducing it to a sequence of weird, somewhat supernatural events that even David Starr finds unclear:

Could I recall my vision! All is clear  
 Save that – my bed of leaves beneath the rock;  
 The doubt if I were still indeed myself,  
 And any thing was what it seemed; until  
 Came languid peace, then awe and shuddering  
 Without a cause, a frost in every vein,  
 And the heart hammered, as to burst mine ears.  
 Something slid past me, cold and serpent-like:  
 The trees were filled with whispers; and afar  
 Called voices not of man: and then my soul  
 Went forth from me, and spread and grew aloft  
 Through darting lights – His arrows, here and there  
 Shot down on earth. But now my knowledge fades:  
 What followed, keener, mightier, than a dream,  
 My hope interprets. Only this I know, –  
 The dark, invisible pillars of the sky

Breathed like deep organ-pipes of awful sound:  
 A myriad myriad tongues the choral sang;  
 And drowned in it, stunned with excess of power,  
 My soul sank down, and sleep my body touched. (22-23)

In all this extended description of his prophetic call (if indeed it is that, which Starr himself questions later) there is nothing of the supernatural realism of early Mormonism. There is no appearance of actual beings, let alone with actual, physical bodies. Taylor leaves out Moroni and the gold plates entirely. No seer stones or Urim and Thummim offer physical connections to revelation. For all Starr's seeking for the spiritual gifts of the Bible and early Christianity, they are noticeably absent from the text itself (aside from a brief episode of speaking in tongues by Livia when she first is blessed by David Starr). The one actual physical prophetic experience—when a large piece of stone falls after Starr, speaking of “signs of power,” points “My finger at a crest of yonder rock, / And say, ‘Be thou removed!’” (37)—“seems irritatingly pale next to the events which began the ministry of Joseph Smith” (Schwartz, *BYU Studies* 240). In his effort to bring Joseph Smith and Mormonism to a level at which his readers could more easily relate, Taylor strips the religion of one of its most defining characteristics—Joseph Smith's bringing of heaven to earth—the actual, physical connection between God and man.

In these cases, Taylor's ethical move is to reduce Mormonism to something “understandable.” Here we see shades of both Levinas and Said. For both philosophers, reduction was a cardinal sin of ethics—to reduce is to deny what is essential in the Other, to create a new Other that can be manipulated for the creator's purposes. Taylor mines the story and characters of Mormonism for his project and leaves the religion partially

barren as a result. This is not to critique Taylor's disagreement with Mormon doctrine or disbelief in its origins. A reader can hardly expect a non-Mormon to write a believing story of Mormonism. But ethically one can and should expect any writer, believer or not, to at least grasp the essential elements of his subject.

Largely unexplored is another, more subtle cultural projection at work in *The Prophet*. Despite Taylor's efforts to make Joseph Smith more accessible, more "normal," he creates an exotic Mormonism. "Exotic" here usually means "oriental," probably because Orientalism fascinated western readers deeply at this time.<sup>2</sup>

Even a casual perusal of American fiction about Mormons reveals repeated appeals to perceived analogies with Oriental religion.

Comparisons of the Latter-day prophets [first Joseph Smith and then, inevitably, Brigham Young] with Mohammed, an abundance of allusions to the 'harems' of the elders, and, as late as 1912, a popular text on the religion entitled *Mormonism: The Islam of America* (by Bruce Kinney) bear out this widespread practice. (Givens 130)

Leonard Arrington and Jon Haupt refer to this stereotype as the "lustful Turk" (247).

Givens cites numerous examples of this type of stereotype, particularly as they relate to polygamy and harems (130-31).

Such creation of Mormons exemplifies Said's Orientalism, the process of fabrication of the Other from home-grown materials. In this case, Taylor uses his own

---

<sup>2</sup>For example, there are numerous tales from travel literature as well as fiction depicting westerners who obtain status as "insiders" among Arabs, Turks, and others, and reveal the "mysterious secrets" of the Orient. Such revelations came from, among others, Richard Burton and Bayard Taylor himself, as I will discuss below. Taylor even edited a book of travel literature from Arabia.

experiences as a travel writer (a true Orientalist, by Said's definition), combines them with the cultural fears and fantasies of his day, and creates a Mormonism that in many cases matches, almost eerily, his Near Eastern travel writings.

It is probably unfair to say that Taylor denies any Oriental connection in *The Prophet*, since we have record of no such accusation made to him. He does, however, emphatically affirm that "It is wholly American in scene, character, and plot; in fact, the story could not happen in any other part of the world" (Hansen-Taylor 638). That Taylor's *Prophet* is "wholly American" is wholly untrue (though Taylor may have firmly believed it). The influence of Taylor's eastern travels manifests itself in the "exoticizing" of the Mormons, though his exoticizing is less explicit than in many other works of the same period (see Givens 130-133 for several examples). Such exoticizing, particularly as relates to the Orient, runs throughout *The Prophet*.

That Bayard Taylor shared in and fanned the flames of society's fascination with the east is without question. "He was imaginatively drawn to the color and sensuousness of the Middle East, and it is no surprise that he found it largely as he had imagined" (Wermuth 43). He traveled extensively in the Near (and less extensively in the Far) East, and wrote numerous travel narratives. Taylor wrote one entire volume on *The Lands of the Saracens*, not to mention his travels to India, Japan, and elsewhere in the Far East.

He penetrated darkest Africa, was with Perry at Japan's gate, had his nose frozen in Finland, at the two-dollar table d'hôte in San Francisco during the gold rush, entered Indian temples and Chinese pagodas, sat in harems and conversed with eunuchs, crawled into the inner chambers of pyramids, tried on Cheops' signet ring, smoked hashish, and swam in the Dead Sea.

No adolescent dream of grandeur has ever been more fully realized. (Cary  
17)



Fig. 3 – Bayard Taylor and servant in Arab clothing.  
National Portrait Gallery online, Smithsonian institution.  
2 June 2007 <http://www.npg.si.edu/exh/brush/bigbtay.htm>

Taylor loved and was influenced by the Orient. “The ritual of the bath in the Orient intrigued Taylor considerably” (Beatty 125). Indeed, he devoted an entire chapter to “A Dissertation on Bathing and Bodies” (*Saracens* 149-160). A favorite portrait showed Taylor dressed in clothing he

obtained in Egypt, his servant Achmet (who accompanied him on his Middle

East travels) by his side (see fig. 3).

After traveling in the Orient the story of the Mormons (particularly their polygamy and reputation for supreme power placed in the hands of one or a few men) must have struck a chord with Taylor. In 1873 he wrote to two friends a letter describing “A much more ambitious and important conception, which I have carried in my head for seven years past . . . at last put into words” (Hansen-Taylor 634). This, of course, was the idea which eventually became *The Prophet*. Taylor, by his own reckoning, had been conceiving and planning the Mormon poetic drama since 1867 (Schwartz places the genesis of Taylor’s Mormon ideas in 1862 [237], but does not state how he arrives at this year). He had published *The Lands of the Saracens* in 1854 and had traveled in Greece and Russia later in that decade. Almost immediately after completing *The Prophet* (which

he wrote in Germany) Taylor traveled to Egypt. While his travels to the Near and Far East did not immediately precede *The Prophet*, they were not in the distant past, and must have been on his mind to some extent, since that was his first trip after its completion. Of the extent to which Taylor consciously used any Oriental influences we have no contextual evidence, since he not only doesn't mention it but specifically states otherwise (that *The Prophet* is "wholly American"). Richard Cary does discuss the extent to which Taylor and his "Genteel Circle" used the Orient in their writing: "these four poets resorted to older, more remote literatures. They ransacked Persian, Chinese, and Arabic poetry for inspiration at second hand. They wrote or translated in the manner of numerous Orientals" (Cary 7). Taylor had a history of weaving the Orient into his own poetic writings.

Since we know of Taylor's fascination with the Orient and his clear interest in Mormonism as epic material, it remains to discover textual connections between the two. First, a word should be said regarding the inherent exoticness of Mormonism. Recalling Neal Lambert's statement on the "almost insurmountable literary difficulties" to writing "great literature" from Mormon source material (Lambert 64), we might add that the very concept of a restoration of the early Christian religion automatically brings with it religious principles that to many Americans in the nineteenth century seemed foreign: apostles and prophets, miracles, angelic visitations, and tithing, among other examples. Harold Bloom, in one of his chapters on Mormonism, describes this otherness:

nothing about our country seems so marvelously strange, so terrible and so wonderful, as its weird identification with ancient Israelite religion and with the primitive Christian Church that supposedly came out of it. The

largest paradox concerning the American Religion is that it is truly a biblical religion, whereas Judaism and Christianity never were that, despite all their passionate protestations. (81)

As mentioned above, Taylor downplays some of this, yet further exoticizes things like the temple, which he makes out to be a revival of ancient Israel's temple, complete with Holy of Holies and a new ark of the covenant: "the shrine set up, / Symbolic vessels [one of which is later identified as the menorah], altar, veil, and ark" (*Prophet* 109). Taylor, with the concern over scriptural literalism being a basis for *The Prophet*, would have heartily agreed with Bloom's assessment of the closeness of American religious adherence to the Bible.

After the inherent "Orientalism" of a restored early Christianity, the most immediate connections we find are in the cast of characters. Consider the names Taylor gives some of his characters: David, Elkanah, Hannah, Nimrod, Simeon, Mordecai, Jonas, and Sarah, for example (7). Not all of these names are equally exotic, but certainly we have ample evidence of the Near East in these names, most (if not all) of which are Semitic. At least David, Elkanah, and Sarah all practiced polygamy in the Bible. These names have definite near-eastern associations, particularly relating to polygamy.

Other parallels come from the authority and organization of the Near-Eastern seraglios and tribes and David Starr's church and aides. Starr is Taylor's Turkish sultan—consider his arrival in the holy city, as Taylor sets up in his framing directions for the coming scene:

*A street on a high, airy plateau, overlooking the course of a great river. In the centre stands the unfinished walls of the temple; opposite to them a*

*house larger than the others, its front hung with garlands, and an arch of green boughs spanning the entrance. The people, several hundred in number, are drawn up in lines on both sides of the street, with branches in their hands. Shouts are heard in the distance, announcing the arrival of the train: then DAVID appears on horseback, a little in advance, bare-headed, wearing a long white mantle: the people cast their branches before him. (96)*

The people, led by Livia, the “worldly woman” who later seduces David Starr, sing a song of ancient Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. Livia, the worldly woman and eventually Starr’s second wife, hails and congratulates him warmly, placing a crown upon his head (98). Now Taylor’s description of the arrival of Sultan Abdul-Medjid from his travels abroad:

At this moment the sun, appearing above the hill . . . threw his earliest rays upon the gilded pinnacles of the Seraglio. The commotion in the long court-yard increased. The marines were formed into exact line, . . . the crowd pressed closer to the line of the procession, and in five minutes the grand pageant was set in motion. . . . [After the arrival of various members of the sultan’s guard and household] came the Sultan’s body-guard, a company of tall, strong men, in crimson tunics and white trousers, with lofty plumes . . . in their hats. Some of them carried crests of green feathers, fastened upon long staves. . . . In the centre of a hollow square of plume-bearing guards rode Abdul-Medjid himself, on a snow-white steed. Every one bowed profoundly as he passed along. (*Saracens* 334-37)

The procession is accompanied by music. The sultan wears white pants and gloves with a mantle of dark blue cloth. After dismounting the sultan “received the congratulations of his family, his wives, and the principal personages of his household, all of whom came to kiss his feet” (338-39). The parallels between these passages demonstrate a sort of second-degree Orientalism. First, Taylor, in his travel writings, exemplifies Orientalism as defined by Said. Then he uses the same Orientalist images, ironically, in depicting what he calls a “wholly American” subject. He clearly sees the Orient in Mormonism, and imposes the sensational elements of his “Oriental” experience on the rise of the LDS Church.

The organization of the seraglio, and its authority, is also paralleled in the dwarf/eunuch figure. Taylor recounts a story of the head dwarf of the sultan who asks for a wife from the sultan’s harem. Clearly the practice of granting wives would come more from an Oriental tradition. Nimrod uses this same principle—that of “granting permission” to a man undecided between two women, in *The Prophet*. Nimrod, the unwaveringly loyal and yet ambitious servant of David, plays the part of both the unflinching eunuch of the seraglio and of the head dwarf who obtains his desires in women by association with and faithful service to the sultan (*Saracens* 336).

In his introduction of polygamy Taylor departs from actual Mormon history. Readers traditionally expect polygamy to be initiated by men to satisfy lust (hence Arrington and Haupt’s “lustful Turk” stereotype). Indeed, Nimrod (Brigham Young), not David (Joseph Smith), is the first to suggest the practice. But Taylor adds a further twist in imputing a woman as another significant origin of the very Oriental practice of polygamy. Livia Romney is introduced to us in the *Dramatis Personae* as “A Woman of

*the World.*” Such an introduction would be calculated to conjure in the reader’s mind an exoticness not found in an ordinary woman like Rhoda. Livia enters the story as David rides triumphantly into his city. She catches his attention. Later they meet and David is entranced:

When was ever such?  
 The clear-eyed spirit, so superbly housed,  
 The power that bends in soft subservience,  
 The gift that beams on all except herself,—  
 Yes, she is chosen. Yea, from out her eyes,  
 And from her hands, and breathing forth from her,  
 Is promise. (118)

Livia then flatters the prophet with his great power over people, continuing the seduction. Finally, in an appeal to David’s power (which, apparently, is waning somewhat), Livia implies polygamy as a way into the hearts of women—to “capture” them and be their master:

There is no woman lives but in her soul  
 Demands a bridegroom; failing one of flesh,  
 Then one of spirit. Learn to promise this  
 In secret visitations, mystic signs,  
 Make truth seem love, and knowledge ecstasy,  
 And you will lead our sex. (127)

If a woman cannot have a husband “of flesh”—probably here referring to a normal marriage relationship—let her have a “spiritual” one—in this context Livia must be

referring to secretive plural marriages, or perhaps even more sensationally, to a marriage in “spirit,” where sexual relations are had without an official marriage contract. Later the seduction is completed in the temple itself, where David finally both gives in to and takes Livia as his. Livia takes a guitar and sings her love to David, then, after a further exchange of love and desire, David proclaims: “I fear no more; I wait no longer: come!” (*Prophet* 204-9).

Taylor, in his poem “The Temptation of Hassan Ben Kahled,” describes a similar exchange between a woman of the world and Hassan. She sings to him, her beauty pierces him, then finally Hassan declares, “Scarce had she ceased, when overcame, I fell / Upon her bosom, where the lute no more / That night was cradled” (Beatty 173-74). The threads of seduction are similar and, to Taylor, Oriental (particularly since Livia is not only seducing David, but embracing the Oriental practice of polygamy along with it).

In 1874 Bayard Taylor, after much criticism of his subject (Mormonism) as beneath real literature, defends himself in a private letter by distancing himself from the Mormon element of the work. “The critics are mistaken in supposing that my design was to represent a phase of Mormon history. The original conception was totally unconnected with any actual events; the features which suggest the Mormons were added long afterwards” (Hansen-Taylor 664). The following year, in a more public disavowal of the Mormon elements, Taylor wrote to a magazine in New York,

“The Prophet” does not represent the early history of the Mormons, and David Starr is as far as possible from being Joe Smith [Taylor claims Starr is based on a Rev. Edward Irving]. . . . In David Starr’s case the unquestioning acceptance . . . that the Bible is not only divine, but that

every word in it was written from the direct dictation of the Holy Spirit — is the power which impels him: this is the fate which makes the tragedy of his life inevitable. (Hansen-Taylor 665)

Interestingly, in attempting to distance his work from Mormonism, Taylor's "moral of the story" directly correlates with Bloom's paradox of Mormonism (and American Religion): that it is altogether *too* Biblical. Taylor and Bloom make the same point, and that point is that the religion is, in fact, Oriental in nature, and that's the problem (at least for Taylor it is. For Bloom it is the fascination and the paradox). Taylor's explanation itself (though he lies barefacedly in it) demonstrates the Orientalism of his work.

In spite of its ethical problems, however, *The Prophet* is a far more positive than negative step in the ethics of representing Mormons. Taylor's concern with his personal and literary reputation may allow us to overlook his deceptive disavowal of Mormonism as the subject of his tragedy, so we can focus on the many positive aspects of his portrayal.

Earlier I examined the reduction of the Mormon experience by Taylor's excision of the physicality of Joseph Smith's foundational prophetic experiences (the First Vision, the appearance of the angel Moroni, the gold plates, the physical laying on of hands to restore ancient priesthood authority, etc.). But there is a positive ethical side to Taylor's move. Removing the more "bizarre" supernatural elements of Mormonism does make it more accessible to the average American reader.

Since Mormons at the time were viewed as far outside the pale of traditional Christianity, Taylor could hardly have used real Mormonism to represent Christianity—he had a responsibility to the represented (for his larger purpose, Christianity) as well as

to the message itself. Taylor wrote of his project, “I make the origin of the Mormon sect and the Joe Smith tragedy the historical background of my poem but my plot has the universal human element. It stirs up more than one question which disturbs the undercurrents of the world just now, for it is pervaded with that sort of logic which lay behind the Greek idea of fate” (*Letters* 647). This aestheticizing of Mormonism, to achieve a more “universal human element,” must have been among the first efforts by virtually anyone, Mormon or otherwise, to move toward more conventional Christianity in representing the Church. In making such a move Taylor is fighting against one of the more powerful representational currents of the century—the desire to further distance Mormonism from the mainstream, to make it increasingly other.

At least as important as what Taylor includes in his description of David Starr (Joseph Smith) is what he does *not* include. Gone are the descriptions of the dark countenance, the sinister mien, the evil eyes. Gone also is the hard-drinking, lazy charlatan who is looking for someone to support his idleness. The reader looks in vain for what Lambert describes as the “drunken bumkin” or the “mysterious seducer” (65). Taylor’s David Starr is likely a first in nineteenth century representation of Joseph Smith, at least by non-Mormons—a tragic character with whom readers are invited, to some extent at least, to sympathize. Early on David’s romance with Rhoda is pure and admirable, and David’s seeking for spiritual truth and gifts carries no negative overtones. When called by a revivalist preacher to repentance, David responds:

For what should I repent? Why pray as these

Who cry from secret consciousness of sin?

I never let a fault against me stand

For day of settlement, then balanced all  
 By pleading bankrupt, only to begin  
 A fresh account. Acceptance, yea, and faith,  
 Are mine already, tenfold more than yours,  
 Who neither ask, nor know what ye should ask. (12)

While one can read a hint of pride in the answer, David exemplifies the Romantic hero – earthy, sincere, independent. He rejects the hypocrisy of the preacher with Jesus’ condemnation: “Woe to the Pharisees and hypocrites, / Even here as there, even in these latter days” (13). David is a good, decent person, hardly a conniver or seducer, as previous stereotypes depict. And he serves, at this point at least, as a vehicle to promote Taylor’s critique of literalist Christianity. All of which set up Starr’s fall as all the more tragic.

This sympathetic depiction of Joseph Smith is an essential characteristic of the form of Taylor’s work, the dramatic tragedy. Taylor loosely follows the classical tragedy form, with a hero who has a tragic flaw (David’s would be a literal interpretation of scripture, which leads to susceptibility to false spiritual inspiration and to manipulation by others, most notably Nimrod and Livia). Taylor’s choice of this very high-toned literary form is itself evidence of how seriously he was taking Joseph Smith and Mormonism (this very fact is what brought so much scorn on him by his critics). While others representing Mormons in the era were writing cheap sinister murder mysteries and bawdy songs exploiting the sexuality of Mormon polygamy, Taylor chose to write a poetic tragedy in blank verse.

*The Prophet* shares some key elements with Goethe's *Faust*, which is not surprising, since Bayard Taylor's literary reputation rested foremost on his translation of that text. David, like Faust, seeks after knowledge that he can not obtain by earthly means, and this seeking leads to the exploitation of his tragic flaw. The form and tone of *The Prophet*, as well as a truly Faustian moment for David Starr, are shown just after Nimrod Kraft asks Starr: "I pray you lay your hands upon my head, / And bless me" (29). Starr, who only recently had his "vision" and felt called as a prophet of sorts, questions his own authority and calling: "How, then? Without the power / Assume the office?" He proceeds to give the blessing, on the justification that "a blessing dwells within the heart of him that calls it down; / Or else he dare not" (29). He is still the sincere David Starr, not yet comfortable in his role as prophet, yet in his willingness to assume a power he does not yet truly feel, Taylor hints at Starr's vulnerability and his tragic flaw. His self-doubt endears him to the reader and makes the fall, only hinted at here, tragic.

After the blessing Nimrod leaves and David feels the pull of his newfound power. Like Faust, there is a question as to who or what is in charge—David has received the call and is the "prophet," but his blessing of Nimrod invites the question: is he using his power or is his power using him? A tipping point occurs in his soliloquy:

A powerful soul! And yet  
 Acknowledges authority in me.  
 Why was I faint or doubtful? Have I reached  
 Too high, perchance, or dreamed commissioned power  
 Should be by signs and wonders heralded,  
 Not as the simple consequence of faith?

.....

If power unconsciously be held, I climb  
 The while I seem to beat a weary round;  
 Possess authority beyond my sense;  
 Am blinded, yea, because so near the light;  
 And weak, since even now my shoulders bear  
 The unwonted burden. Let the vision come!  
 It cannot fail: the first and largest star  
 Already glimmers from the expanding vault,  
 And millions wait behind. So sure as they  
 Shall pierce the veil when thickest, even so  
 The first faint lamp within a seeking soul  
 Foretells the revelations crowding on. (30)

This moment begins the transition from the sincere, unlettered hero who trusts in his faith over the authority of the hypocritical preacher to the prophet who assumes authority based not on faith but on perceived divine revelatory authority. The earlier Starr, unaffected by the devious Nimrod, rejected any authority outside of his own sincere, independent faith. The new prophet, lured by the power Nimrod implicitly grants him, embraces his new authority and seeks even more. Nimrod here functions as Mephistopheles to David as Faust.

Taylor's David Starr is misguided, of course, but not demonic (that adjective might be applied, however, to Nimrod and Livia). And the style, form, and Faustian allusions in *The Prophet* make Taylor's dramatic poem an effort, if not an entirely

successful one, to place Mormonism among the highest literary subjects of western civilization, near not only to *Faust* but also to Shakespeare's tragedies and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. And if Taylor didn't reach his goal in literary terms, ethically his work was and is pivotal in the history of Mormon representation.

Chapter Three - *The Giant Joshua* and Maureen Whipple

Maureen Whipple, raised as a Latter-day Saint in St. George and educated in Utah, did not write as an outsider trying to see into the Mormon culture. Neither, however, did she write as a complete insider. Whipple was among the several writers grouped together by Edward Geary as “Mormondom’s Lost Generation” (obviously paralleling “Lost Generation” writers such as Ernest Hemingway), those who “left the valleys of their birth for the promise of a richer life in California or the East. For many, leaving the region meant leaving the Church, for they could not clearly separate their Mormon-ness from their Utah-ness” (Geary 92). Among “at least a dozen different [fiction] authors” who wrote during the peak decade of this “Mormon Lost Generation,” roughly the 1940s, are Vardis Fisher (*Children of God: An American Epic*), Virginia Sorensen (*A Little Lower than the Angels, On This Star, The Evening and the Morning Star*), and Paul Bailey (*For This My Glory*).

Significantly, Whipple, unlike other writers from this regional movement, “chose to keep her hometown as her home. There . . . she has been ostracized, not honored; and like some other Mormon intellectuals and artists, she has lived . . . in exile at home” (Jorgensen, “Retrospection,” par. 5). Whipple, then, holds a rare position in terms of representing Latter-day Saints. She left the state and the Church, but returned and remained in Utah. She wrote from personal experience and considered herself Mormon, but as Bruce Jorgensen has written, she demonstrates a “partial failure to comprehend Mormon spirituality, Mormon experience of the sacred, in its own terms” (par. 18).

Without question the significance of one of Mormondom’s “Lost Generation” writing about Latter-day Saints is different from that of a writer who, like Bayard Taylor,

is at best an observer of Mormonism who employs Latter-day Saints and their beliefs, practices, and culture as a literary tool. Whipple herself represents a generation where intellectual writers would engage with Mormonism in a deeper way. In her preface to *The Giant Joshua*, Maureen Whipple offers to us her two driving motives behind this book. After two paragraphs on the historicity of certain elements in the text, she describes the “gallant courage” and “unconquerable faith” of the Mormon pioneers, and “the spirit that lived in their hearts . . . that can never die” (ii). Here is her first motive: to honor the courage, faith, and spirit of the Mormon pioneers. The second follows just after the first: “I believe we detract from their achievement when we paint them with too white a brush. . . . I believe that what they did becomes even greater when we face the fact that they were human beings by birth and only saints by adoption” (ii). The second motive stems from a desire to embrace the humanity of these pioneers—their weaknesses as well as their strengths. Whipple implies a dichotomy both real and representational: in terms of “reality,” she offers the division between faith and humanity, between the religious fervor which drove Mormon pioneers to settle inhospitable lands and the personal struggles that tried and tested that faith even more than nature’s brutality.

In representational terms, Whipple’s struggle is between hagiography, or more accurately what she critiques as a sort of hagiolatry, and a desire to connect personally with the extraordinary people about which she is writing, the Mormon pioneers. Apparently disillusioned with “whitewashed” versions of much of the Mormon history she received in St. George, she wishes to paint more realistic portraits of those she admires. Whipple’s preface primes us for the main struggle carried out in the next 633 pages—between what Whipple calls “humanity” and orthodoxy. For my purpose I will

use the term “orthodox” to describe the characters who demonstrate unswerving commitment to the Mormon cause, who abide carefully by its tenets, and who feel and express strong belief in its principles, doctrines, and theology. This struggle is carried out both within the text and, more broadly, in Whipple’s creation of the text and the response of readers, both inside and outside the Church. Geary notes that Whipple follows a formula common to almost all Mormon Lost Generation pioneer novels: “The central conflict is nearly always between individualism and authority . . . Communal values took precedence over individual tastes; obedience to authority was more important than individual judgment; and the achieving of communal goals mattered more than personal fulfillment” (93). The conflict is so common among the novels that “it is possible to outline a single ‘story’ with certain basic figures that reappear in different forms” (93). Such uniformity of conflict and even of plot and character obviously reflects the broader concerns and anxieties of intellectual Mormons of the generation. Whipple, as *The Giant Joshua* indicates, shared these concerns deeply.

*The Giant Joshua* tells the story of the heroine, Clorinda (Clory) MacIntyre, third wife of Abijah MacIntyre. Clorinda is an impressionable young woman, somewhat coquettish but also full of hope, who gradually has her dreams and aspirations beaten down by the harsh realities of the St. George climate, marriage to a much older authoritarian and chauvinistic man, rivalry with his overbearing first wife, deaths of children, and a religious orthodoxy she finds nearly impossible to embrace throughout her life. Her husband, Abijah, is a pious, devout man but authoritarian and sexist. Other main characters include Bathsheba (’Sheba), Abijah’s first wife, a strong but shrewish woman who dominates the household and whose jealousy of Clorinda creates numerous

household problems; Wilhelmina (Willie), Abijah's second wife, a quiet, unassuming woman with an inner strength but no obvious self-will; Freeborn (Free), son of Abijah and Bathsheba, roughly the same age as Clory, with whom he shares a love that embarrasses the household and which eventually results in Free leaving the family permanently to live a "wild" life with his friends; Erastus Snow, pragmatic and gentle Church apostle; and Pal, Clory's closest friend and subservient wife to David Wight.

The novel opens with Abijah and his family, including his three wives, traveling to the St. George area in 1861, with a group of settlers sent by Brigham Young to colonize the area. Clory has recently married Abijah, under the direction of Brigham Young, though she is only fifteen years old and their marriage has not yet been consummated. When they arrive they immediately construct a bowery, or temporary church meeting place, begin construction on a school, and survey the land to divide into building lots.

During this time Abijah struggles with his sexual desire for Clory, eventually consummating the marriage in an open field during a trip to find crop land. After this Abijah becomes sexually obsessed with Clory, even prompting a mild rebuke from Erastus Snow for abusing his marriage relationship, and soon Clory is pregnant. Also during this time Free and Clory (who is frustrated at the lack of romance in her marriage) begin an illicit romance which results in a priesthood court in which a concerned but forgiving Erastus Snow calls for an end to their seeing each other but without the harsh punishment sought by Abijah.

As homes become established Clory begins to assert her independence (which throughout the book causes no end of consternation for Abijah), demanding and even

beginning by herself to carve a dugout home for herself rather than accept living under the same roof as Bathsheba. The community battles the annual flood of the Virgin River, which destroys every dam they build to help irrigate the desert land. They battle hunger and drought, establish homes and gardens, and raise families. The settlers band together in times of difficulty, not only working on irrigation projects, crops, and public buildings, but holding community celebrations, complete with parades, “potato races, three-legged races, chasing the greased pig” (199), and happiness in the midst of drought and trial.

Clory’s pregnancy only augments her desire for independence—she clings to the very idea of her baby as an expression of her individuality “She felt more than ever that her baby was *hers, alone*” (192). Despite leaders’ warnings, the romance between Clory and Free simmers and then comes to a head before Clory’s baby is born, as Clory takes a watering turn and Free arrives at night. They kiss for the first time and Free begs her to run away with him, but she, fearing Abijah’s reprisal and feeling “gradually ecstasy pale before reality” (218), resists: “No, my darling, you have your job and I have mine. And all that counts is doing ‘em” (219).

Clory gives birth to a baby daughter, Clarista (Kissy), to whom she devotes her life. The community braces for a visit from Brigham Young, who inspects the community and offers advice both spiritual and physical (“I would say to you always, Brother Mac – and you may teach your boys – pay your debts, keep your bowels open, walk uprightly before God and you will never have a care” [261]).

The love between Clory and Freeborn persists. Free never marries and Clory thrills with her now infrequent encounters with him. Finally, though, Free is killed in a battle with the Indians, and Clory lapses into despair at the loss of the one love of her life:

*“It isn’t worth it, she wanted to cry. Nothing on earth or in heaven is worth it! Can’t you see that we’re all just handfuls of dirt to be dumped in a box?”* (347). From this point on, Clory only lives for her daughter Kissy.

As time passes, Abijah is called on a mission to the British Isles and leaves his wives behind to care for their homes, crops, and children. While he is away the “black canker” descends upon the town, taking many lives, including Kissy’s. When Abijah learns of Kissy’s death, he writes to tell Clory that the death is a punishment for her behavior. Clory has lost everything she loved and lived for. On the suggestion of Brigham Young, Clory learns the craft of making buckskin gloves from local Indians and excels at it, beginning to make her own living. Willie, ever the quiet faithful wife, has a child at age forty-six, a daughter, but she dies as a result of that birth. Before her death she makes Clory promise not to let Sheba raise the little girl, “named Tempelina after the Temple I won’t never see” (496). Abijah gives her a priesthood blessing, but will not allow her to be medically treated for her problem, which causes Clory to blame him for Willie’s death.

Clory now raises “Tempie” and her own son, Jimmie, and as life goes on Abijah reaches a comfortable level of prosperity and prominence in the community. Clory finds herself increasingly at odds with Abijah over the raising of the two children, with arguments and threats of leaving him behind. She ponders divorce and its costs, both financial: “Even Brother Brigham, who performed marriages free, charged ten dollars for a divorce!” (551); and spiritual: “A divorced woman was outside the pale, her chances for salvation extremely slim, since a man could enter heaven in style, . . . but the only way a woman could get in was by clinging to some man’s coat-tails” (551).

She stays with Abijah and the prosecution of polygamists increases, causing plural wives and children from those marriages to go underground. Abijah is called as the St. George temple president, which only increases his imperiousness: “Ech, such behavior is not fitting in the son of the Temple’s President!” (585). Near the end of the book, Abijah is called to move to Logan to be the Logan Temple president and told by Church authorities that he may take only one wife. Clory’s hopes to go with him are dashed when Abijah marries a young girl and takes her with him to Logan. She finishes her life in St. George and, just before she dies, “the Great Smile beckons. And suddenly, with the shock of a thousand exploding light-balls, she recognizes the Great Smile at last” and she realizes that she has a testimony (633).

While it has problems, the novel represents a significant positive step in the ethics of Mormon representation. On the negative side, despite her Mormon upbringing, Whipple betrays a lack of understanding of some key elements of the Mormon experience; the romance and melodrama of the MacIntyre household lean toward sensational conventions of earlier fiction about polygamy; and she tends to exaggerate the dichotomy she introduced in the preface, between orthodoxy and humanity (perhaps unsurprisingly, considering the values and concerns she shared with others in the Mormon Lost Generation era). On the positive side, Whipple does manage, while occasionally teetering on the edge, to keep her main characters out of the realm of stereotype, making them more complicated individuals than at first may be apparent. And one of her most significant ethical successes is her ability to capture the essence of the Mormon pioneer experience itself—not just the miraculous stories recounted in Church Sunday School classes nor the abuses of Mountain Meadows or ill-advised statements of

some Church leaders, but the day-to-day life of a community struggling with climate, local natives, the federal government, and its individual members, all while trying to stay pious in its devotion to God.

A fairly straightforward, objective ethical test for fiction writers which represent real groups of people is to ask, does the writer get his facts straight? This is especially important when writing historical fiction like *The Giant Joshua*, since history forms the backdrop of the entire story. Early in the novel, Whipple fails a sort of “shibboleth” test, one which someone claiming to represent Church history should pass. She includes a passage introducing the history of the Mormon Church through questions from Apostle Erastus Snow and answers from a group of saints there with him. While Whipple generally covers Church history effectively and accurately, she makes a few important historical errors. Through her characters, she incorrectly locates Joseph Smith’s First Vision in Manchester, New York (it was in Palmyra), and offers Palmyra as the location for the organization of the Church (which occurred in Fayette, New York). Probably less importantly, since both the pioneers and Latter-day Saints in 1941 would have been less familiar with the Book of Mormon than with the major early events of Church history, she also has the Book of Mormon’s Jaredites “destroyed by the Israelites” (76), when in that book they divided into two camps and destroyed themselves, and preceded the house of Israel by several hundred years. Her characters in “real life” almost certainly would have known better—an apostle led the recitation, some of the audience knew Joseph Smith personally, and by Clory’s account this exchange was a regular occurrence which had become rote for many of its participants. These errors may be relatively minor and nearly insignificant in relation to Whipple’s overall project, but perhaps readers should be

able to expect more from a writer who herself was raised in the Church, who admires the great saints of LDS history, and who certainly would have had access to Church members who could have corrected these minor historical errors. They indicate a small measure of carelessness which unnecessarily, if marginally, undermines Whipple's credibility as one who knows her subject deeply and thoroughly, especially when compared to the meticulously researched details of daily pioneer life she includes (discussed below). Her errors are especially difficult since this passage is the main place in the book where the reader unfamiliar with LDS Church history will come to understand the reasons behind the Mormon exodus and settlement of various areas in and outside of what would become the state of Utah. Whipple shows herself to be not entirely "within" the community she is representing, thus raising the ethical bar for the rest of the novel—the faithful Mormon will be less forgiving of someone who writes as an insider but misses some key historical facts.

In *The Giant Joshua* Whipple employs not entirely stereotypical characters, but she does overplay the difference between deep Mormon observance and humanity, resorting to old tropes of the overbearing, judgmental strictly religious characters and the sympathetic doubters. Whipple's heroine, Clorinda MacIntyre, embodies the struggle between orthodoxy and humanity, and the main characters that surround her tend to fall to one side or the other of the dichotomy.

Whipple's statement in the preface, that Mormon pioneers "were human beings by birth and only saints by adoption," does not need to mean that Latter-day Sainthood or deeply held Mormon beliefs and practices are at odds with human sympathy, but the text suggests that Whipple (with her fellow Mormon Lost Generation writers) held this point

of view, at least to some extent. Abijah, Clorinda's authoritarian and chauvinistic husband, and Abijah's first wife Bathsheba are the two most important orthodox characters in the book. Both are self-righteous and spend a great deal of time judging those who do not measure up to their standards.

Of the main characters, those who are orthodox in their religious sentiments are largely unsympathetic: Abijah, Bathsheba, and, to a lesser degree, Brigham Young. The middle ground—characters who are orthodox, but mostly due to their subservience—is occupied by the pitiable characters: Willie and Pal, primarily. Whipple's sympathetic characters are for the most part unorthodox: Clory, Free, and even Erastus Snow.

Abijah has the fire and judgmentalism of a zealot. "Thwarted by the beam in his own eye, he plucked at the mote in his neighbor's" (273). He seeks to dominate his wives, and when they refuse to submit it irks him no end: "There had always been something not quite saddle-broken in Clory, . . . This habit of laughing at herself and life, this elusive mischievousness, was what he had most distrusted" (464-65). When Kissy dies, Abijah calls it God's punishment for Clory's behavior, probably the most egregious in a long line of self-righteous acts and statements by Abijah. And when he marries young Julia to take her with him to Logan, his pious protestations about following God's will and trying to do what is best for Clory are, of course, hollow hypocrisy.

Bathsheba, too, is domineering and judgmental throughout the book. When she hears Clory and Pal whispering to each other during a particularly long and tedious prayer by Abijah, she silently vows: "You'll suffer for this, young lady" (69). She spends much of her time scolding everyone else in the family: "'Well, I'm tired, too,' she burst

out at Clory and Willie, who were helping prepare the meal, ‘but you never hear me complain!’” (119).

’Sheba is also set up as comical. “Of course Bathsheba belonged to the old-fashioned one-limb-at-a-time folks, anyway; those who believed that if the [Mormon temple] garments were never entirely shed, even during a bath, they armored the body against enemy bullet and Indian arrow, as well as temptations. . . . [Clory] giggled again at the thought of ’Sheba scrubbing herself in relays” (62). When a fellow settler, Betsy Tuckett, has a hard time in childbirth in her wagon, ’Sheba searches the supplies in the wagon to find the cause of the hard labor and exclaims, triumphant, “There! . . . No wonder she’s havin’ a bad time. If [Betsy’s husband] Lon had his way, carryin’ that axe inside the wagon like that, she’d be dead!” (50).

Brigham Young is more complicated and less prominent a character in the novel, but the very fact of his convincing Clory that marrying Abijah is the Lord’s will for her makes him problematic, and his bringing a younger wife with him to St. George toward the end of his life, probably justifying (in Abijah’s mind) to some degree Abijah’s parallel final act of disloyalty, does not help. His universal advice can also seem somewhat pedantic.

For both of the major pious characters, Abijah and Bathsheba, hypocrisy rules the day. Neither is sympathetic, and Abijah, the most self-righteous character in the book, ends up irredeemable, living up (or down) to the reputation Whipple gives him in the end. By giving strict orthodoxy to the two least sympathetic characters, Whipple suggests that it is inherently negative.

Pal and Willie are, in a sense, subserviently orthodox. They go along with their husbands, whatever course that may be. In Pal's case, the most telling example occurs when Mr. Nelson questions her personal beliefs in Mormonism. Mr. Nelson asks, "'And what do *you* believe, Sister Wight?' Pal blinked startled eyes. 'Why – why,' she stuttered, overcome, 'David says I don't *have* to understand my religion, all I have to do is obey it!'" (365). This is hardly an admirable characteristic.

Willie is more complicated—she seems to be easy-going, willing to accept whatever decisions are made, so long as her minimal needs are met. At the time when Clory was contemplating the prospect of living in the same house as Bathsheba, she climbs in the wagon next to Willie and asks, "'Wouldn't you rather have a little house of your own, Aunt Willie?' Willie raised her head, belched, and shuddered weakly. 'Laws, child,' she said, 'it makes no never minds to me. All I ask is a place to lay my 'ead, right now'" (118). But Willie has more willpower in may be at first apparent. The two times Willie faces death, first after a miscarriage and second when she does actually die from childbirth complications, she demands of Clory that 'Sheba not be allowed to lay her out for burial or raise her daughter Tempie. It is difficult to determine the extent to which Willie holds convictions of Mormonism, but she carries on nonetheless.

In these two cases, faithfully following Mormonism seems to be more an inevitability than a conscious decision, which means that orthodoxy has nothing to do with the sympathetic portrayal of the characters, and in fact reflects on them more negatively than positively.

The heroine Clory's struggle with orthodoxy has already been laid out, as well as her desire for a testimony and, as described by Bruce Jorgensen, her incomplete (at best)

understanding of what such a thing might be. An episode recounted above in defense of Whipple's own struggle with orthodoxy illustrates here that same struggle, with the firm conviction often heard from Mormons reduced to a sort of warm feeling that hardly satisfies her doubts about the organized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When Kissy asks her mother what a testimony is she tries "to find words for those rare moments when limitations thinned and the great Smile beckoned," but ends up thinking instead about how she "sometimes hated the Gospel that shut her children out from the gay things of life, shut them in with ignorance, poverty, and danger" (396).

Some of Free's importance as a character in the novel comes from being the illicit love interest—what Jorgensen characterizes as a sensational nod to popular romances of Whipple's day. Viewed through this romantic lens Free serves a purpose not dissimilar to the soldiers depicted in a serial cartoon in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, December 19, 1857. In an illustration included in *The Mormon Graphic Image*, the women are clutching at the dashing (gentile) soldiers while a Mormon elder hangs onto them from behind. "Mormon men [are] unable to match the allurements of their gentile counterparts" (Bunker and Bitton 22). But even Free is portrayed as more sympathetic than the orthodox members of the Church, representing as he does Clory's only chance at true love.

Erastus Snow is the character that complicates this sort of ethical reading of *The Giant Joshua*. It would be hard to characterize him as less than orthodox, since he is an apostle in the Church, but he is easily the most sympathetic Church leader in the book. I believe Whipple characterizes him as most sympathetic in his moments of doubt. He has far more open views of what Mormonism means: "his interpretation of Mormonism was

very simple: here there would be brotherly love” (61). Such sentiments echo Jorgensen’s complaint about anachronistic twentieth century ideals Whipple imposes on the pioneers. Erastus, though an apostle, has very liberal views of Mormon orthodoxy, reducing Mormonism to “brotherly love.” Elsewhere, Erastus shows his off-color side: “Damn-it-to-hell! thought Erastus, hoping the Lord was busy elsewhere at the moment” (366). These faults are those of generosity, which makes them palatable to Whipple. Strict adherence to Mormon tenets does not concern Erastus. We have no evidence of him questioning the foundations or doctrines of Mormonism, but his statements of Mormonism being simply “brotherly love” indicate a reduction of the faith to a simplistic ethical code.

In what may be the most important scenes demonstrating Snow’s sympathetic nature, he has a very hard time removing the Church membership from Orson Pratt, Jr. for apostasy, though the case was obvious. “There was nothing left to do but cut him off. Just the formal vote. And yet Erastus could not bring himself to speak.” He even ponders the fact that “he had a right to his own beliefs,” and revisits his own “past doubts— Brother Brigham pushing men about, as if they were wooden figures on a checkerboard, . . . You had to be ruthless to colonize” (131-32). But “*togetherness*” triumphs in the end—again, not a doctrinal Mormonism, but a practical one, something akin to the “brotherly love” version mentioned above. Even with this consideration, Whipple spares Erastus the opprobrium of having to be the one to sever Orson’s membership. After Erastus’ long pondering pause, before he has a chance to express a decision, Orson stands and effectively cuts himself off. Erastus is left to ponder if “Maybe the fault was his. Maybe if he had counseled with him more, the testimony would have come” (133).

Erastus' self-doubt makes him "human" (in the sense Whipple used in her preface). The relative paucity of such moments for the other strictly adherent characters like Abijah and 'Sheba makes them all the less sympathetic.

At the end of this scene Abijah brings Clory and Free, who have associated together romantically but not even kissed, before the same council, and "the sore place in [Erastus'] heart quivered in angry recognition" (133). After hearing the story, he tenderly touches Clory's face and shakes his head at Abijah, "There's no sin in her . . . they're just young" (133). He counsels Clory to "beware of giddiness . . . carelessness," Freeborn to find himself a wife of his own, go "through the Endowment House, [clothe himself] with the priesthood", and reserves his most stinging rebuke, as Jesus did, for the hypocrite Abijah: "Erastus sighed in spite of himself. . . . There was such a thing as over-righteousness. 'Brother Mac, you're like the butterfly who passed up all the flowers in the garden to light on the manure in the barnyard'" (134). Erastus is the voice of reason which, for Whipple, is the voice of not over-doing religious fervor. He demonstrates kindness and love, which are in short supply in Abijah. Erastus here can be read as Whipple's hope for the best of Mormonism, and he is a very positive character. The scene demonstrates the stark contrast between him and Abijah, whose strict interpretations of Mormon orthodoxy are portrayed as self-righteous and hypocritical.

Thus Whipple does lapse into problematic ethics in representing Mormonism. She doesn't fall back completely on stereotypical depictions (as I will discuss below), but she exploits the old trope of strict religious adherence and deeply held beliefs as self-righteousness. Readers, without a deeper personal understanding of Mormons and Mormonism, might easily (and have, both in Whipple's era and today) come away with

the impression that strict observance of Latter-day Saint tenets causes its adherents to look down on others and judge them harshly, and that those who question their faith and struggle with their testimony are treated as second-class members. This is not to say that religious orthodoxy must place principles above people in order to accurately represent deeply held spiritual beliefs. But such is the standard Whipple creates in Abijah and Bathsheba.

In a sense parallel to the Orientalist portraits of Arab culture described by Said, Whipple's strictly observant Mormons have less to do with real Mormon pioneers, at least in terms of religiosity, than they have to do with Whipple's own anxieties about religious zeal. Said states that "Orientalism is premised upon . . . the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says" (*Orientalism* 20-21). Similarly, Whipple "makes orthodoxy speak," unmasking it as an act of power and authoritarianism and blind obedience. What is *not* important to the Orientalist (and to Whipple's depiction of Mormon orthodoxy)? The "correctness of the representation" (21). Here the strictly observant Mormons exist more to further Whipple's melodrama than to capture accurately the Mormon spiritual experience.

For Said, "European representation of the Muslim, Ottoman, or Arab was always a way of controlling the redoubtable Orient." The subject of "contemporary learned Orientalists . . . is not so much the East itself as the East made known, and therefore less fearsome, to the Western reading public" (*Orientalism* 60). Orientalism as Said describes it represents a Western power play. Whipple's portrayal of Mormon adherence serves a

similar function—to make strict Mormonism terribly alien and therefore at least somewhat fearsome to most of America, “known” to those unfamiliar with it. By reducing the two main strictly observant Mormon characters, Abijah and ’Sheba, to oppressive or even comical terms, the reader (and probably the unorthodox side of Whipple) exercises a kind of moral power over strict Mormon believers, even as they seem to appear more “dangerous.” In fact, making deeply held religious beliefs “dangerous” to body, mind, or spirit is a move which, paradoxically, reduces the potential “danger” to readers, since they are now aware of the potential “traps” of such beliefs and observances.

Among the ethical criteria I use to examine *The Giant Joshua* is the relationship between the author, the text, and the past. Does Whipple impose her present, including values and conflicts, on the pioneer history she depicts? Authors can not help but see the past through contemporary lenses, but this becomes a problem if expectations are placed on characters or groups that they could not have understood at the time. *The Giant Joshua* has a “problematic relation . . . to the history and living memory of the place and people that inspired the book” (Jorgensen, “Retrospection,” par. 6). Whipple’s “guilt” lies, along with that of her fellow Mormon “expatriates,” in applying a contemporary cultural move toward personal fulfillment over communal need, and a desire to throw off authority in an effort to achieve personal freedom. Certainly her characters follow the pattern Geary outlines:

The central figure . . . is the character “in between,” who can neither escape from the community nor feel comfortable within it. . . . Most often . . . the character is divided, wanting in a way to become a wholehearted

member of the community yet also longing to escape, to find some mode of life less filled with hardships, more rewarding culturally and aesthetically. (94)

Such a struggle, such an internal conflict, while extremely important in Whipple's era, might not have had such a strong pull in the days of pioneer settlements, when individuals understood that the communities' needs would almost always trump individual concerns. The struggle for individuality, to escape the confines of the community, often comes after that community has established itself enough that communal concerns are generally already addressed. This would definitely have been the case in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Church was no longer pioneering (at least in the geographical sense) and was not under attack as a community for its practice of polygamy. As it moved forward into a more mainstream position in American culture, the broader cultural values, including the desire for individuality and "freedom" from communal restrictions, would gain increased purchase among members. While Whipple certainly pays homage to the Saints' physical struggles, there is in Clory an element of cultural anachronism.

Anachronism or no, Whipple has every right to employ a Mormon pioneer wife to lend weight to Whipple's era's concern with self-fulfillment over religious orthodoxy, but she is subject to the criticism of cultural exploitation. Burton and Kramer raise this very issue with Lost Generation writers generally:

Much of what concerned Mormons who have reacted negatively to the "good" writers of the Lost Generation (those who met the high aesthetic standards from the New Criticism) was the perception that Mormon

religious life was being used as a prop for aestheticism, which seemed to undercut the power of Mormon spiritual experience. *That is to say, the LDS elements in such writings appeared to be exploited rather than respected.* That remains a perennial difficulty. (Burton and Kramer 3, emphasis mine)

A key element in both criticisms is exploitation. Exploitation is a charge most effectively leveled at erstwhile cultural and ethnic insiders, since it most commonly involves a sense of betrayal.

Whipple borrows old exploitative tropes in her depictions, knowing that such depictions traditionally have played well on the national stage. If she did feel loyalty to the Mormon community and did expect or at least hope the book would be received warmly by her Mormon neighbors, she demonstrated another “partial failure to comprehend Mormon spirituality, Mormon experience of the sacred, in its own terms” (Jorgensen, “Retrospection,” par. 18). Her exploitation of strict Mormon adherence is reminiscent of Maria Ward’s *Female Life Among the Mormons*, published in 1855, supposedly the story of Ward’s own experiences as a professed Mormon. Ward’s sensationalism is extreme, attributing Mormon leaders’ power over their listeners to Mesmerism and declaring that her future husband had some “unaccountable influence drawing my sympathies towards him. In vain I struggled to break the spell” (qtd. in Givens 139). Obviously Whipple does not go anywhere near that far, but she does exploit, to a degree, both her Mormon background and the public’s sensibilities in her use of strict Mormonism and polygamy as tools of oppression.

Another criterion for ethical evaluation of any text is the choice of implied audience. Probably the most significant ethical concern—for Mormons at least—in this novel is not the satire nor even the polygamous stereotypes employed by Whipple, but rather the relationship between those elements and the audience. Different implied audiences require different sensitivities in the author, hence choosing an audience is in itself an ethical act. Mormons reading contemporary Mormon-targeted satire might chuckle at Bathsheba’s silly folk remedies or feel annoyance with Abijah’s sexism or either character’s self-righteousness without anger at the author. Mormons will recognize these characteristics in many of their own members and such subjects are not uncommon among novels written by Mormons to Mormons. Such a benign reaction from Mormons seems to have been Whipple’s expectation, considering the surprise she felt at the almost universal disdain the Mormon community had for her novel. The cultural disconnect seems to stem from the fact that *The Giant Joshua’s* intended audience was predominately non-Mormon, literary readers.

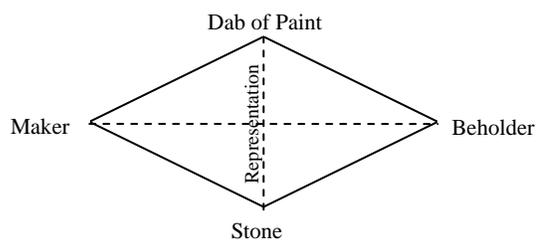


Fig. 4, Representational diamond, from W.J.T. Mitchell, “Representation” *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. 2nd ed. Ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995) 12.

Choosing an audience is in itself an ethical act. In attempting to reach out to a national literary audience Whipple changed the dynamics of her portrayal of Mormonism itself. The ethics of the “Representation” axis in Mitchell’s diamond, reproduced here again (fig. 4),

changes dramatically when the Beholder is not an “insider” to Mormonism. Whipple bears a much greater responsibility to the represented (Mormons) when the Beholder (the

national literary readership) is not already familiar with that object. The Maker must consider that the Beholder, having had limited or no exposure to the represented object, may assume that the representation and the represented are one and the same—a precarious position. Because of the danger of this assumption, the Beholder has an additional ethical responsibility both to the Maker and to the represented—that of reading “at a distance,” or critically. Since it is safe to say that many Beholders will not properly employ that critical distance, representations that might otherwise be innocent are likely to be construed as unethical. As in the “niggardly” case recounted above, when Washington, D.C. mayoral aide used the term in reference to a miserly budget item and felt pressured to resign as a result, there is no “ideal Maker” (should Howard have “dumbed down” his words to accommodate a less-educated audience? The NAACP’s Julian Bond didn’t seem to think so), but certainly a sensitivity to possible interpretations would be the hallmark of an ethical Maker.

When *The Giant Joshua* was published in 1941, The LDS Church was in the process of moving beyond its polygamous era (which officially ended in 1890), with all that practice’s representational baggage, and the nation knew relatively little about the Church outside of this single over-riding issue. Mid-twentieth century Mormons may not have been ready to have the world read *The Giant Joshua*, with its criticism of Mormon orthodoxy, patriarchy, and communalism, for fear (justifiable, based on its Mormon history) that these criticisms would represent not individual Mormons, but the Church as a whole.

This may, in fact, be one of the most challenging obstacles to significant Mormon literature—and not, as some would argue, that serious issues, doubts, and real problems

in the Mormon community cannot be dealt with significantly by an orthodox writer, nor that Mormon writers do not have the courage to grapple with the real problems inherent to Mormon orthodoxy. The obstacle may be the discomfort of broadcasting these problems to the literary world at large. It is not that Mormons don't want the world to know that such problems exist among them, nor that Mormons don't want others to know that such problems pose serious challenges to the faith of the orthodox. This representational anxiety stems from the concern that such problems will come to represent Mormons *generally*—in other words, that satirical portraits of Mormons in serious literature will cause non-Mormons to believe and accept not that Mormons have such problems, but rather that *Mormonism* has such problems—that the problems are built in to the Mormon religion or ethnicity. Hence we find some faithful Latter-day Saints reacting harshly to what was perceived as disproportionate time, in the 2007 PBS documentary *The Mormons*, spent on the Mountain Meadows Massacre and polygamy. I don't know any Mormons who either deny that these things happened or think that PBS should have ignored them, but Mormons' main concern was the overall impression watchers would take away from the documentary, which was made, according to filmmaker Helen Whitney in “hope that most of the stereotypes — ideally, all of them — will be blown away” (qtd. in Pierce, par. 2). Mormon anxiety regarding the airing of its “dirty laundry” will only diminish as it gains a relationship of trust with the Beholder—when Mormons know that their problems will not come to define their religion or culture, because the public has the depth of knowledge to contextualize those problems.

I believe that, whatever the faults of *The Giant Joshua*, Whipple does transcend the stereotypical portrayals of Mormons and even overcomes her exploitative tendencies,

to move Mormon representation toward greater ethical responsibility. Whipple's story, of a woman "trapped" in a bad polygamous marriage, is risky, since it so easily lends itself to cheap clichés. While some of her main characters do, as discussed, look like polygamous stereotypes (stern, self-righteous husband, domineering first wife, etc.), Jorgensen argues, and I agree, that "Most of the novel's characters convincingly avoid stereotypes and live in their own element." Whipple keeps Abijah from becoming "the lustful bearded Elder inveigling innocent girls into his harem; instead he is genuinely pious and guiltily sensual, exasperating and self-exasperated; hard to dismiss, despite his excessive male chauvinism and self-importance; hard to look at with just one attitude" ("Retrospection," par. 14). Whipple has Abijah ruling his household with an iron fist, but he is continually baffled by the power Clory has over him, sexually and even spiritually: "He hated Clory for making his conscience this tormenting goad" (130). She makes him forget "that he was a servant of the Lord" (93). And when, in a fit of sexual desire, he hates her because "she was like a drug in his veins" (102), Abijah projects his own self-doubt onto his wife: "He resented women, anyway, because he thought in his heart they were the one means of keeping him from being absolutely pure" (102). This is hardly a good man, but it is a complicated man whose self-doubt causes most of his need to dominate his wives. And when, near the end of the book, he weeps openly and declares "Ech, it's like tearing the hear-rt out of my bosom!" as he leaves two of his wives behind to take his new trophy bride with him to Logan, Clory decides that "he really does look as if he meant it" (610). As always, "Abijah was at a loss . . . Curse a fyllie, she had always left him at a loss" (611). He is a conundrum, but one that is not unrecognizable to Mormon readers.

Bathsheba, too, manages to cheat easy categorization. She “is a Mormon termagant of heroic proportions, a walking compendium of frontier folk wisdom and superstitions, cruel to her children, narrow and mean to the point of shrewishness, yet, for all that, admirable; a woman who, as Clory observes, ‘seemed to fit this country’” (Jorgensen, par. 14). She can be bitter, but surprisingly sensitive, as when she offers Clory furniture for her new home. Her folk remedies can be comical, but no sturdier woman graces the pages of the book, and she ranks among the strongest pioneer women in western literature. Whipple raises her completely out of the realm of the stereotypical near the end, when Clory finally understands what it must have been like for 'Sheba as she watches Abijah's sassy young wife taunt her and Bathsheba:

Clory was suddenly nauseated. Staring at 'Sheba as if she had never seen her before, remembering the chit of a girl she herself had been, she was gripped with an acute and unexpected sympathy. Why, this was how 'Sheba must have felt! There was understanding in 'Sheba's own eyes and something like dour humor. And between the two women a queer and instantaneous bond. (606)

Whipple creates in this scene a bond not just between 'Sheba and Clory but between the reader and 'Sheba, who Whipple now completes as an individual identity, no longer simply representing a category of the shrewish first polygamous wife.

Here, referring back to Levinas, we might see Whipple, in her portrayal of more complex characters that avoid popular stereotypes, “facing” these individuals *as* individuals. The “face,” for Levinas, is the epitome of alterity. Levinas states, “The other is not other because he would have other attributes, or would have been born elsewhere

or at another moment, or because he would be of a different race. The other is other because of me: unique and in some manner different than the individual belonging to a genus” (*Is It Righteous* 106). The key here to Whipple’s ethics, as Levinas describes, is not that she writes objectively, about something outside her experience—the other is not other because of ethnic difference. According to Levinas, “It is not difference which makes alterity: alterity makes difference” (*Is It Righteous* 106). The recognition of the alterity of the individual means I understand that he is different from me, regardless of our similarities, perceived or real. To separate the other from a genus is to “face” him, to acknowledge fundamentally that he is not simply symbolic or representative of anything, but is inherently unique. He is also not simply a projection of my personal anxieties or concerns.

For Levinas, racism opposes completely the recognition of alterity. To express racism is to reject alterity, to avoid “the face of the other” and instead to assign a value as commodity to “things that one would possess or reject” (*Is It Righteous* 111). All ethnic bigotry relies on reduction of individuals to types or classes, Levinas’ “genus.” Stereotypes of Mormons during Whipple’s day are examples of the literary commodification of Mormons—their value depends entirely upon the representer—they have no inherent identity. Whipple’s characters cannot simply be written off and ignored by ethical critics, because they escape their genus. They qualify as “other” not because they are ethnically different from Whipple (or from the reader, for that matter), but because they are, in the end, individuals. They are Mormons, but they are not Mormonism.

A further criterion for ethical evaluation involves the authenticity of the representation. If an author wishes to portray a particular group, especially a religious or ethnic group (or both), he must have some kind of experience or research to draw on for that authenticity. If the characters, situations, plots, or settings do not ring true to the reader (from the represented group, at least) then ethically the writer digs himself a deep ethical hole from which the representation will have a hard time emerging. These experiences can include tensions and problems, but they must be authentic to that culture's experience. Whipple manages to avoid falling into the ruts of irresponsible representation at least in part because of her background. In fact, maintaining her residence in St. George, even when, as Jorgensen notes, "living in exile at home," "ostracized" by her own people, seems to add a certain depth and poignancy to her depiction of Clory, who struggles her whole life to reconcile her ever-nascent desire to move beyond the bonds of Mormon patriarchy and polygamy while still clinging to her hope to one day have a "testimony" of the Church. Clory's life in some ways parallels Whipple's own. Both lived in a personal and in some respects spiritual exile among their own people.

Another reason *The Giant Joshua* does succeed at many levels is that Whipple herself feels the tension between the two cultures she straddles. In a telling passage, Mr. Nelson, who here seems to embody the cultural tug-of-war Whipple felt (and which Geary describes as characteristic of Mormon Lost Generation writers), declares one of the frustrating and powerful elements of Mormonism to be

Togetherness. . . . You were persecuted because you had *togetherness*, but it also gave you your strength. . . . *Togetherness!* The ability to sacrifice

oneself for the Common Good – the Common Good, defined by all the people before hand and then upheld by all the people. . . . You, David Wight, couldn't live without your neighbor – he's your very life – and yet you'd sacrifice him if he were an apostate or an interfering gentile. People like you can be the cruelest and yet the most soft-hearted in the world. You'd damn a man and pray for him as you damned him! (364-65)

In the last three sentences of this passage, in particular, one can almost hear Whipple speaking to the people of St. George, among whom she lived for most of her adult life. She may not have been in “exile” among her people until after *The Giant Joshua* was published, but she clearly already feels the tension between the Mormon community's desire for unity above individuality. The fact that she avoids simple stereotypes of Mormon togetherness, recognizing the power of that principle to do good as well as to stifle, gives her representations of Mormons and Mormonism greater depth than many other, and especially earlier, writers about Latter-day Saints. As Jorgensen writes, “When Miss Whipple imagines ‘those old people’ through the folk speech she inherited from them, they come grittily alive and true; when her abstractions and popular clichés try to waft them up to the heroic ‘Idea,’ they lose dimension and substance” (“Retrospection,” par. 24). So long as she writes her characters as individuals she succeeds both literarily and ethically, but when she treats her characters as symbols of some greater Truth, as I will discuss below, she fails in the same senses.

Authenticity of character matters as a further criterion in ethical evaluation. The characters may be sympathetic or otherwise, but they should, if the writer is seeking to represent the ethnicity itself, be believable, particularly from someone inside the group

being represented. If Jorgensen is right that Whipple at least partially fails to comprehend Mormon spirituality, Clory's efforts to reach what she herself doesn't understand seem very real indeed. Jorgensen cites as an example of this failure the "Great Smile" passages, in which Whipple expresses "a religious climax, such as Clory feels at the birth of her first child, treated in a diction of vague romantic mysticism that, while not anachronistic, seems hardly native to pioneer Mormon culture" (par. 18). Jorgensen may be right about such terms being foreign to the pioneers, but something in these passages rings powerfully true as an expression of a doubter's attempt at understanding and belief. One of the most important of these passages occurs as Clory tucks into bed her daughter Kissy, who has just asked, "what's a testimony?" True, Clory's answer is likely not that of a pioneer mother, but the authenticity of the passage that follows suggests that Whipple has grappled with this question herself:

"Why – why – uh, it's knowing the Lord loves you . . ." . . .

Clory, tucking Kissy in beside John, trying to find words for those rare moments when limitations thinned and the great Smile beckoned, trying to give her child the warmth of the love that rose up in her throat like tears, sometimes hated the Gospel that shut her children out from the gay things of life, shut them in with ignorance, poverty, and danger . . .  
(395-96)

In such passages Whipple acknowledges, implicitly, that there is something ineffable about the spiritual reaching that occurs in many Latter-day Saints. Whipple does not try to cheapen the Mormon spirituality of those who aren't sure of themselves and their testimonies. Never does Clory represent all Mormons. She is an individual struggling

with the great questions many other Mormons seem to have resolved, and Whipple acknowledges this.

Whipple, like Clory MacIntyre, “die[s] with the tension unresolved” (Geary 93). This tension, between her Mormon upbringing and the culture and religion she never quite manages to fully embrace, Jorgensen suggests may have partially been responsible for Whipple’s failure “to write the second and third novels of her projected trilogy on ‘the evolution of the Mormon idea,’ and the relegation of what deserves to be a Mormon classic to a twilight, underground existence for more than a generation” (“Retrospection,” par. 6). While the book received critical claim outside the Mormon community, the reaction of her fellow Mormons to her novel, almost universally negative, must have made further writing on the subject painful, and in any case dissuaded her from completing even the second book in her planned trilogy. Such a loss is unfortunate, since her literary sensitivity to the subject of Mormonism, its accomplishments and challenges, remains in short supply today.

One more criterion for ethical evaluation when representing ethnicities is respect for the group itself and its experience. By its very nature, fiction focuses on individuals, even when telling a group story. Ethically this presents writers with the conundrum of trying to represent an entire religion or ethnicity, particularly in long forms like the novel, in telling an individual story. Such a representation is fraught with ethical danger, since inevitably some members of that group will take offense, feeling that their experience has not been represented correctly. Whipple, I believe, manages that difficulty with great sensitivity to the group experience as well as the individuals she portrays.

In 1997, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Mormon pioneer company to cross the plains, Walter Kirn, a self-described “lapsed” Mormon, visited some sites important to Church history. He concluded his trip by joining a group of Latter-day Saints reenacting the pioneer trek from Nebraska to Salt Lake City.

A few hours before sundown, the wagon train made camp. I had walked only a few miles that day, but I was parched and exhausted. A meal was served. I sat in the dirt and devoured a plate of meat loaf, while around me devout believers watered horses, repaired bent wagon wheels, fed bottles to crying infants. In just a few days, to quote their ancestors, they would cross the mountains and be “safe in Zion.” I could not help wishing them well. In their epic trek across Smith's American Eden, they have lost more paradises than they've found. (“Walking a mile,” par. 15)

This reaction, from a man who “as an adult . . . was tempted to make fun of” (par. 6) Mormons, with their strong convictions of religious certainties he had been trained to discount, captures anecdotally another of Whipple’s major accomplishments in *The Giant Joshua*. The journey a reader takes through this text, thanks to Whipple’s exhaustive research and careful attention to detail in portraying the ordinary lives and terrible trials of pioneer life, offers a perspective that transcends personal belief or disbelief in the cause of Mormonism. Like Kirn, Whipple may not share the convictions of Abijah, Bathsheba, or Pal, and she may even set them up as unsympathetic characters, if not stereotypes. But the overall picture of Mormon pioneers, at least, is sympathetic—there is an element of protagonist to the pioneer community itself, and the careful reader will find

himself “wishing them well” as a people, whatever disagreements he may have with individuals.

One scene that introduces this sense of community, of the Mormon people as group protagonist, occurs fairly early in the story, after the saints have arrived in St. George but before they have built any houses, when Whipple describes a call-and-response recitation between Apostle Erastus Snow and the saints gathered with him. Erastus asks questions whose answers are well-known to his listeners: “The catechism was familiar as habit to Clory” (75). As it continues the responders take turns answering the questions, fleshing out Church history:

“How old was Joseph when he had his first vision?” . . .

A man’s reply this time: “He was fifteen, and it was 1820, the year of the great religious revival, and he read . . .

“When was his second vision?”

“Three years later. The angel Mormoni appeared to him at the Hill Cumorah and gave him the golden plates . . .

“And what was the record on these plates?”

A child’s voice: “Book of Mormon!” . . .

The kindly drawl: “And how do we know . . . the Book of Mormon is true? . . .” . . .

Chorus: “Testimony of the three witnesses and the eight witnesses!” . . .

“Did any of the three or the eight signers ever go back on his testimony?”

## Chorus that shook the wagon box: “No!” (76-77)

The passage runs a total of seventeen pages (with Clory’s personal reflections interspersed), all the way from the First Vision through the settlers’ departure for “Utah’s Dixie,” the St. George area. As the historical recitation reaches the persecutions of Missouri and Nauvoo, the responses become longer and more detailed, drawing the reader deeper into Mormon history.

This section serves multiple purposes: first and foremost, it sets the stage for the reader unfamiliar with Mormon history; second, the question-and-response format suggests the indoctrination of Mormons by their priesthood leaders; and third, it deepens the representation of Clory’s religious side, since as she listened, “the litany took on new meaning, and pictures began to form before her closed eyes” (75) and, just a little way into the story, “Clory was suddenly feeling the ‘thick darkness that gathered around,’ and hearing the voice from out the blinding light” (76). She enters personally into Church history through this recitation and has a personal experience with Joseph Smith’s First Vision. To this point in the story we have had little of Clorinda’s conviction of the Church and much of her confusion and doubt. Without scenes such as this one, this struggle would be almost entirely one-sided, and this experience adds emotional depth to the passages where Clory questions her own testimony of the Church.

This passage’s importance to the ethical work of the text increases as the exchange does to the community generally what it does to Clory individually—it draws them in to the group, diminishing doubts and personal insecurities to augment the sense of togetherness, of a common heritage and bond that forges the group protagonist which becomes so important throughout the book. It sets the communal stage, so to speak, in

illustrating the bond these pioneers felt as they faced their numberless trials and disappointments. As the questions and answers continue, the speakers delve further and further into the dark days of persecution, in which Mormons were assaulted, robbed, raped, murdered, and driven from their homes, mostly because of their unorthodox religious beliefs and the growing strength of their community. This recitation of history and especially persecution reminds the community of what can happen when there is division among the people and thus reinforces the need for unity. This, in turn, makes the authoritarianism (often apparently misguided) of some leaders, including Brigham Young, Erastus Snow (though rarely), and even Abijah, more understandable. The exchange creates a cohesive community protagonist which then can be followed, along with the individual protagonist Clory, as almost a parallel plot. Clory is one half of “The central conflict . . . between individualism and authority” (93). The community, bound together by shared beliefs and experiences and needs, is the other half. Whipple never really chooses sides between these two parallel protagonists. While often at odds, they both receive Whipple’s sympathy, as if, while she cannot personally accept the trade-off of individuality required by the community, she understands why this sacrifice is required.

The carefully researched and well-wrought details about material and social conditions add life to the text and to the Mormon pioneers. The canvas on which Whipple paints the portraits (whatever faults those portraits may have) of Abijah, Bathsheba, Clory, Free, Erastus, and even Brigham Young is authentic enough that the reader will likely emerge from its viewing with a respect for that people, if not for individual characters.

Bathsheba, visiting Clory's newly completed dugout home,

“scratch[es] a finger-nail along the still-damp earth of the wall.

“‘They won't be dry for another couple days. . . . Bottom your floor good now and you won't have so much dust later on.’ And remember’ – she peered into the low, dark shadows – ‘sweep the corners and the middle of the floor will sweep itself.’” (147)

This is just one of almost innumerable bits of practical advice dispensed liberally by Bathsheba, all authentic to their day, though many may seem comical to the contemporary reader. These details bring 'Sheba and her world to life, offering an authentic window to the daily life of a polygamous pioneer wife.

Throughout, Whipple recounts many of the intimate details of pioneer life—the planting, irrigation, and often failure of crops, the proper way to mud a dugout home, the joy of obtaining just one small piece of fashionable clothing from the East, pioneer picnic activities, the monumental and heroic battle with the Virgin River just described, the issuing of T.O. (Tithing Office) scrip for commerce, local discussions about political machinations in Washington, D.C. regarding polygamy, Brigham Young's occasional visits and then construction of his own home there, the building of the St. George Tabernacle and later the Temple.

Perhaps the most important recurring story that exemplifies the struggles of these saints is their ongoing battle to tame the Virgin River. Erastus Snow, pondering the latest catastrophe in which the river destroyed yet another of the settlers' dams, lamented that the river

was always fooling him. All summer it dribbled thinly; one day the bed would be almost dry – and the next, a roaring cauldron . . . there were beaver burrowing at the foundations of the dam . . . there was the red clay, the gyp of the canal walls always softening. And there was the silt continually thwarting him – silt in the water itself, filling up the head-gates, blocking the canals . . . Problems for which someone had to figure the answers if the Dixie Mission was to survive.

No use lulling themselves with the thought that the Lord would do it all; no use going on patching up the canal. No use putting in new brush dams every year, damming the river a little farther up each time. Only reason they'd salvaged some of the crops this year was because the floods had come later than usual, after the grain and corn and hay were all in.

(326)

Time after time the community rallies to build a new or try to save the latest dam. Time after time the river destroys it, causing crop failures, starvation, despair. Whipple goes into great detail explaining Erastus' plan for a pile dam: "There were to be ten rows of poles, the rows about three feet apart and each row two feet shorter so that the river in flood-time could ease gently down in steps," and on and on—almost half a page devoted to the details of how a pile dam might finally "[have] that river with its tail between its legs" (327). Each year, regardless of improvements, the dam is destroyed by the torrential flooding of the Virgin. David Wight, after seeing yet another dam, this one of rock, destroyed by the river, laments, "An earth dam, a brush dam, a pile dam, a rock dam, twenty-three years of it. I'm about through" (588). At this point, near the end of the

novel, the reader can fully sympathize with Lon Tuckett, who, while working to patch the dam yet again, declares, “I vum, I’d as soon go to the bad place, anyhow! Hell ain’t got no terrors for me after Dixie!” (406). The dam offers itself as a symbol of the constant need for that “togetherness” that elicits admiration and frustration from Mr. Nelson and from Maureen Whipple. The togetherness can be read at one level as the tragic hero of the book.

Whipple’s portrait of the people overall as sympathetic, while caricaturing some of the individuals, may run contrary to some readers’ expectations. Readers might expect, and I have argued for, responsible treatment to be more individualistic. In this sense, Whipple fails when her characters fall into classes or types, rather than speaking as individuals, and she succeeds when they, despite stereotypical tendencies, express a complex individuality that avoids the tropes of polygamous representation. Only in separating the individual from the artificial “genus” can one truly “face” that person as other, says Levinas. And Said has convincingly argued that the very concept of classification is an artificial cultural construct. Yet Whipple’s most sympathetic and responsible portrayal of Mormons, ironically, is as a whole community.

At least part of the answer to this apparent paradox is found in a return to the concept of ethnicity, introduced in Chapter One. Boundaries and classifications are often imposed on a group, but in many cases, including that of Mormons, they are self-imposed. Mormons’ sense of religious and cultural difference is very much a part of their self-identity. Respecting their sense of community, then, is respecting their identity. A portrait of that community need not necessarily be sympathetic in the sense of embracing

that community's values, but it should demonstrate a grasp of the significance of those values and respect them, if not agree with them.

In moving the Mormon ethical project forward, Whipple engages in a series of trade-offs, perhaps not dissimilar to her personal struggles with Mormonism. Raised in the culture, she wanted to write that culture for a broad, literary audience, yet she apparently expected the Mormon community to appreciate and perhaps embrace the book she wrote. In *The Giant Joshua* she trades spiritual authenticity for national readership when she resorts to old stereotypes of polygamous Mormons, but she redeems the characters, at least partially, by making them break free of the confines of the stereotypes she uses in creating them. In choosing a national literary audience she risks further "othering" Mormons (in Said's sense, of projecting personal or social anxieties on the represented), but at the same time creates great sympathy for them and their cause in the intimate portrait of the Mormon people's quotidian struggles to create a viable community in a hostile environment. Overall, *The Giant Joshua* makes complex, nuanced, responsible Mormon representations more likely in the future. She contributes to a climate of serious Mormon representation and to respect for the people.

### Conclusion – Creating a Climate for Ethical Representations

Michael Austin introduces his essay “The Function of Mormon Literary Criticism at the Present Time” by talking about what he calls the “Blotnik dichotomy,” in reference to a character in Philip Roth’s story “Conversion of the Jews” who sees everything in life as either “good-for-the-Jews or “no-good-for-the-Jews.” Austin expresses his concern that “This basic binary opposition, . . . has, with minor variations and revisions, begun to assert itself prominently in a number of recent discussions of Mormon literature” (par. 1). Discussions of the ethics of representation, such as this one, run such a risk. Critic Wayne Booth provides a helpful guideline for ethical criticism: “[A] fully responsible ethical criticism will make explicit those appraisals that are implicit whenever a reader or listener reports on stories about human beings in action” (8-9). No ethical critic is a completely disinterested observer, and all ethical criticism is inherently evaluatory (Booth takes great pains to illustrate that even the most formal of criticisms has inescapable ethical components). Careful critics will first recognize and then state their ethical approaches—their criteria for ethical evaluation. According to Booth, this is one of the primary responsibilities of the ethical critic—to explicitly identify what specifically is troubling, enlightening, or useful in a text. Ethical criticism is not a final judgment on whether a text is “good” or “bad,” but a process of critically identifying the “moves” an author makes, the judgments, implicit or explicit, he makes in his representing and the reader makes in his interpreting.

It is valuable here, as I conclude, to re-visit the original philosophical bases for the whole project, Said’s and Levinas’ visions of ethics. Each has a different view of the

Other, and what it means to represent it. Levinas is preoccupied with acknowledging the ontological alterity of the other. For him the “First violence” is the “violence of judgment” which occurs when the representer wishes to ignore the fundamental otherness of the individual (or group) he “faces.” This takes the form of “transformation of faces into objective and plastic forms, into figures which are visible but de-faced; the appearing of men: of individuals, who are certainly unique, but restituted to their genera” (*Is It Righteous* 115-16). This de-facing is to deny individuality.

Said concerns himself, as a post-colonial writer, with the power basis of “othering”—representing the other is creating it or projecting an image of the representer, in an effort to gain power over the represented. Orientalism, a main tool of the othering I am discussing here, “not only creates but also maintains; it *is* . . . a certain *will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different . . . world; it is, above all, a discourse . . . shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political, . . . power intellectual, . . . power cultural, [and] power moral” (*Orientalism* 12).

The effect of both approaches serves, in this project, to increase an awareness of representational responsibility. It is not my purpose in this project to evaluate whether Bayard Taylor and Maureen Whipple are “good-for-the-Mormons” or “no-good-for-the-Mormons.” I have used these two authors’ texts to explore some of the foundations of serious representations of Mormons in American literature. There are challenges to using Mormons as the subject for serious literature, but as these two texts indicate, they are not insurmountable. In analyzing these two texts, I have attempted to establish some criteria that can be used to evaluate the ethics of other serious representations of Mormonism,

particularly as it occurs by “outsiders”—those who are not Latter-day Saints or those who have “lapsed” as members of that religious community. Such criteria includes factual accuracy, exploitation, genre and scope, and the writer’s purpose.

These criteria, combined with contemporary cultural sensitivity, provide a base for examining the ethics of Mormon literary representations. As mentioned in Chapter One, we live in an increasingly multi-culturalist society. Ethnicity has become a badge of honor and “sameness” is often opprobrious. Increased worldwide communication has given previously marginalized groups a greater voice defending their own interests. In the Mormon community one finds remarkable examples of increased respect and sensitivity—Mitt Romney’s presidential campaign has highlighted bigotry at a national level, bringing increased scrutiny of those who continue to marginalize Mormons. Protestant minister and African-American leader Rev. Al Sharpton called LDS apostles to apologize for an offensive remark and paid a conciliatory visit to Salt Lake City, to understand Mormonism better. These events would have been unheard-of just ten or twenty years ago. The cultural climate of ethical sensitivity has probably never, in American history, been more favorable to ethnic groups.

Perhaps the easiest criterion, to evaluate at least, would be accuracy in factual terms—does the writer get the people, events, customs, titles right? As I discussed in Chapter Two, Taylor got some elements of Mormon history wrong (the Old Testament temple elements, the introduction of polygamy by the Brigham Young character, etc.), but his mistakes are easier to forgive, for two reasons: he never was personally associated with the Church, and he represented the Church obliquely, without ever mentioning Mormonism or the “real” names of the Mormon characters. He also got much of the

history right, perhaps surprisingly, given the popular penchant for misrepresenting so much of Mormonism. Whipple got almost all her historical details right, as one would expect because of her Mormon upbringing, which makes her rare inaccuracies perhaps more glaring. As a member of the Church writing specifically about the Church and using actual historical characters as themselves, her responsibility to represent the Church accurately is greater. And she succeeds, in almost every case.

Walter Kirn is a contemporary writer who can help to bring this discussion up to date and tie together the various ethical threads running through this project. He was raised outside the Mormon Church until early adolescence, when his family joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He continued as a practicing, active member through his teenage years and then left the Church as a young adult. As one who was raised outside the Church, spent time as an active member, then left the Church (but stayed a nominal member, and to this day considers himself a “cultural Mormon”), Kirn is part Bayard Taylor, part Maureen Whipple. Like both of these writers, Kirn wrote about Mormons but later backed out of Mormonism as literary subject matter (at least for *Mission to America*, originally planned to be a story about Mormon missionaries).

It doesn't take long, when reading Walter Kirn's "Planetarium," to discover that Kirn has trouble understanding elements of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In just the first two pages or so a Mormon reader will find several eyebrow-raising moments of disregard for accuracy in representing the Church. Kirn's inaccuracies include all adult male members bearing the title "Elder"; the idea of "electing" a bishop (leader of a ward, or Mormon congregation); high Church leaders (in Salt Lake City) intercepting mail and never allowing ward members to see it; ward members standing

(rather than just raising their right hands) to vote for the appointment of the bishop; the “once every couple of months” confessional that the narrator, “like every other Mormon,” attends; and the bishop asking him (a teenager), “Have you committed murder?” (with the implication that this question gets asked of every ward member every other month) (3-5). Because the techniques used by Bishop Johannsen are essential to the story itself—even forming a basis for the plot—I do not include them as among the inaccuracies.<sup>3</sup>

Kirn’s inaccuracies are egregious not just because they give a false impression of Mormons but also because he could have easily corrected them. By asking any even marginally active member to read “Planetarium” (originally published as “Yellow Stars of Utah”) Kirn would have avoided every problem listed above. Instead, Kirn seems to rely on an apparently hazy memory of his experiences as a teenager in the Church. Kirn’s position as Princeton and Oxford graduate, journalist, and book reviewer would seem to indicate an awareness of the importance of accuracy and proper context, suggesting that his inaccuracies stem either from apathy—he couldn’t be bothered to spend time in actual Mormon meetings or consult with others who might have a better understanding of the Church’s practices—or from exploitation of the cultural distance and “strangeness” of Mormonism.

In *The Giant Joshua* the historical errors read as minor mistakes, but they do not derail the story itself. In “Planetarium” Kirn’s failure to “get” Mormonism, or at least to

---

<sup>3</sup> Most if not all Mormons would find Bishop Johannsen’s methods of correcting the sin of masturbation, from telling the boy “Well, cut it out, . . . Just cut the whole thing out” (6) to the bizarre ritual of a group confession with glow-in-the-dark X’s representing each sin, far beyond the pale of Mormon experience.

portray it in a way that would be recognizable to Mormons, distracts from the story.<sup>4</sup> In this story Kirn exemplifies another ethical criterion, introduced by Said particularly, that of avoiding exploitation. Said writes that “the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West. He is never concerned with the Orient except as the first cause of what he says” (*Orientalism* 20-21). The Mormon elements in “Planetarium,” I argue, are exploitative because they exist primarily (or perhaps solely) to accentuate their own strangeness. Kirn’s story would not exist without the strange relationship between bishop and teenage boys, in which the bishop takes them to a dark room together to symbolically view their collective sexual transgressions. And none of this experience has anything to do with Mormonism, which propels the representation into exploitation. In this story, Kirn “is not concerned with [Mormonism],” to use Said’s terms, “except as the first cause of what he says”—it exists only as a mechanism for the bizarre. Taylor and Whipple use Mormonism as a framework, but in their stories the religion exists more or less independent of the writer, meaning that they are accessing something “real” in order to tell their stories. There are elements of exploitation, certainly (particularly Taylor’s exoticizing of Mormonism and Whipple’s reduction of orthodoxy to caricature), but the ethical strengths of their texts outweigh the exploitation. Kirn’s Mormonism is more created than accessed—his version of Mormonism bears nothing more than a slight verbal resemblance to the real religion.

The choice of genre and style is significant as another ethical criterion. Taylor chose the “highest” literary form available—the dramatic tragedy in blank verse, with

---

<sup>4</sup> Kent S. Larsen II has a similar reaction in his review of another Kirn story, “Mormon Eden,” as he writes: “The story has given me a lot to think about, but the excesses portrayed as normal Mormon belief, while necessary to the story, annoyed me a lot” (par. 4).

echoes of Goethe's *Faust*. This choice itself indicates the seriousness with which Taylor took his subject, and this is part of why he was criticized so severely by Henry James—to treat such a low-brow subject as Mormonism in such a high style was considered incongruous. Kirn's "Planetarium" has a somewhat lesser ethical obligation to Mormons overall than *The Giant Joshua*. Whipple writes an epic story spanning decades and including major Mormon leaders, including the prophet Brigham Young. It purports to tell the story of Mormon settlement and the community's hardship, as well as Clory's personal struggles. Kirn is not so ambitious, and therefore bears perhaps a smaller ethical burden, in the sense that he is not pretending to represent the Church as a whole or even a large body—he is simply telling the story of a single leader and a few young men.

The purpose of these texts also matters ethically. Taylor's and Whipple's purposes—to critique Christianity and to create a human picture of Mormon pioneers, respectively—have been outlined at length in their respective chapters. Using an ethnicity to tell a story is an ethically charged move, and creates certain responsibilities in the writer—to the audience and the represented—and in the beholder, who is supposed to understand that purpose and how it relates to the representation itself. Kirn's purpose in "Planetarium" is less obvious, though it might be to create an image of teenage sexual angst and how religion, specifically Mormonism, can distort or increase such anxieties. It is, in a sense, a snapshot. Without an overt purpose, a writer faces different kinds of ethical obligations—there may not be as much anxiety over whether the Beholder "gets it."

I do not wish to indicate that Kirn is "no-good-for-Mormons." In a recent public radio interview with Terry Gross, he discussed the fact that his recent novel *Mission to*

*America* began as a story of Mormon missionaries; but then he decided not to use Mormons and instead to create a new fictional religion, because “there’s so much baggage that comes with Mormonism . . . you have to be true to the theology.” He then goes on to explain that he wanted his story not to be about “two people with a message that I [as author] was snickering at,” hence he wouldn’t use Mormon missionaries, he would create a new, respectable (or at least not to be snickered at) religion. Kirn clearly sees, in spite of his apparent “snickering” at Mormon theology, an ethical obligation to Mormons, or at least their theology and the “baggage” that comes with the religion. Though in “Planetarium” he cheapens the Mormon repentance process and in the story (repeated here in Chapter Three) of his visit to Church history sites he feels like making fun of faithful Mormon believers, the very act of choosing not to portray Mormons is ethical—again, not necessarily “good” or “bad,” but demonstrating an understanding of his own representational responsibility, as well as an understanding of the probable public outcry if he gets Mormon missionaries “wrong” in the story.

Kirn and Taylor make a similar move here. Both create a new religion to avoid the “baggage” that comes with Mormonism. Both worry about possible repercussions and both feel a sense of responsibility, but to two different audiences. Taylor was more concerned with the critical distraction from his purpose—the critique of Christianity generally—and so avoided the direct reference to Mormonism. He felt a responsibility more to the Beholder (the national literary readers) than to the represented (the Mormons). Kirn is more worried about his responsibility to the Mormons themselves, the represented. It is unlikely that Kirn worries about whether the general reading public will figure out theological or cultural misrepresentations of Mormons. But the Mormons will,

and they will raise a hue and cry. He feels a different—not necessarily better or worse—ethical responsibility.

Additionally, in Kirn’s story “Whole Other Bodies” he does not ridicule the Church, but speaks with a sort of nostalgia for the time when his family first embraced a gospel that brought a measure of peace and happiness to a dysfunctional family (this tone parallels that with which he speaks in the interview of his family’s actual conversion to Mormonism and the positive effect it had on the family). After the Mormon missionaries began to teach the family,

The change was slow in our house and took a while to notice, our soft new way of doing things, with less bumping into each other, less noise. . . . my brother would do a thing he’d never done and kindly offer to get us all drinks when we finally sat down at the table. And I would pop up and help him, like magic, not feeling lazy at all, as though it was fun to pitch in and a very nice thing to remember afterwards, how I’d pleased my parents.

(55-56)

His father, during the missionaries’ visits, “was at peace like I’d never seen him” (57).

The story ends at the moment of baptism for the family, “when God took [them] in entirety” (58). Similarly to Whipple, Kirn’s sense of the power of Mormonism is based on its practical effects. In “Whole Other Bodies” one hears the echo of Erastus Snow, whose “interpretation of Mormonism was very simple: here there would be brotherly love” (Whipple 61). Kirn no longer believes in the theology, but he does acknowledge the power of Mormonism to do good. This kind of nuanced portrayal is part of that ethical

climate in which Mormonism can be represented as itself, rather than as a form for anxieties, fantasies or fears of society generally.

Ethically, authors and readers must consider further criteria such as the relationship between the writer, the text, and the “real” historical past—how true to historical values and standards is the text? Does the writer impose contemporary social mores on a culture to whom they would have seemed foreign? To some extent such imposition is inevitable—after all, writers like Maureen Whipple can not go back in time and live that experience. But they carry an ethical burden to be sensitive to the era they represent and not to expect “political correctness,” for example, from a nineteenth-century Mormon prophet.

Authenticity of character is yet another ethical criteria important to this project. Whipple offers an authentic tension between individualism and community, between faith and doubt, between being an insider and an outsider. This tension’s authenticity grows from Whipple’s personal experience with Mormonism. On the other hand, Kirn offers, in “Planetarium” and “Whole Other Bodies,” stories which do not reach a similar tension—Kirn writes as outsider who doesn’t grasp Mormonism (in “Planetarium”) or as an insider who respects the tremendous good accomplished by Mormon missionaries and teachings (“Whole Other Bodies”). One gets the impression that Kirn seems not to have truly struggled with the paradoxes of Mormonism during his time as a member or after—it was acceptance and then abandonment. As a result, the authenticity of his Mormon representations suffers.

I don’t think anyone expects a representation of Mormonism to get everything right. In fact, the many different visions of how Mormons should be represented rule out

that possibility entirely. These texts illustrate, however, that ethically sensitive representations can be created even with certain problems present in the text. Combining the ethical criteria mentioned, which can certainly be expanded at great length to include other issues relevant to ethnic representation, with current social sensitivities, helps critical readers to think in terms of what they can accept in a representation. Some representations break so many of the “rules” that they are clearly unacceptable to most observers, regardless of ethnicity (one good example would be the scorn heaped on the anti-Mormon film “The Godmakers” by the Jewish Anti-Defamation League). On the other hand, despite the impossibility of a representation acceptable to all, most readers are willing to forgive what they may consider minor ethical problems if the overall tone or effect of the text serves a “higher purpose” or meets a higher standard. So I have tended to overlook the relatively minor ethical weaknesses in both Taylor and Whipple in favor of their overall effect to improve a literary climate where Mormons can be treated as subjects for serious literary fiction. Kirn’s “Planetarium” too seriously fails in too many of the ethical criteria and hence, for me at least, diminishes the possibilities for serious Mormon representation.

This may sound as though I am slipping into the “Blotnik dichotomy.” I would clarify that my argument is that these texts contribute to or detract not from Mormonism, but from a climate for representing Mormonism with responsibility and sensitivity, avoiding the exploitation decried by both Said and Levinas. The issue isn’t whether they are good or bad, it is whether they help to create an environment where Mormonism, right or wrong, can be examined seriously, without resorting to the fabrications and

projections Said describes nor to the “de-facing” which is inherent to the violence of appropriating the other, described by Levinas.

Generally I think the cultural sensitivity, both at a literary and a societal level, which contemporary ethical criticism requires of writers can be considered a positive step. It is a step toward the responsibility desired by Levinas and Said. It has had an unfortunate by-product, however. In the case of all three writers: Taylor, Whipple, and Kirn, the responses of readers caused them to back away from Mormons as a subject for serious literature. This highlights the other side of ethics—that of the responsible Beholder. Ethically irresponsible representations create an atmosphere in which Mormons become caricatures or stereotypes, artificially justify already existing public scorn and making serious literature with Mormonism as subject increasingly difficult. Ethically irresponsible readings of efforts such as Taylor’s and Whipple’s and even Kirn’s, in which the reader fails to see the positive in those texts, exaggerating the negative, create a climate just as inhospitable to serious literature about Mormons, perhaps even more so. Causing writers like Taylor, who eventually disavowed the Mormon connection completely; Whipple, who never completed her Mormon trilogy; and Kirn, whose fear of public repercussion caused him to remove Mormonism from his recent novel, to quit Mormonism as a literary project is a victory for no one, least of all for Mormons, who are only further marginalized as a result.

To conclude I would suggest examining Mormon scripture to find clues as to how ethical sensitivity in representation and reception can be increased: “No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the priesthood, only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness, and

pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile” (D&C 121:41-42). Joseph Smith’s counsel on how priesthood holders should seek to guide the Church and its members can be adapted to this project. The passage here does not suggest that no corrections should be offered, or that the individual should always agree with or accept the views or behavior of the other. In literary terms, writers about Mormonism (or any other group or individual) need not feel an obligation to accept or agree with its doctrines, principles, or the behavior of its adherents. Nor are its problems off-limits. In fact, writers may be “moved upon” to reprove Mormons “with sharpness” (D&C 121:43). But such representations can be created with loyalty to the “otherness” of Mormonism, understanding that in representing it the Maker should neither project himself and his own assumptions onto Mormonism, nor fail to understand the uniqueness of its individual members and of its own identity as a group.

These scriptural passages guide the reader in how to treat other individual people, but they can also guide readers in how to treat texts. Wayne Booth, near the conclusion of *The Company We Keep*, suggests “that we should make our choices from among formal fictions pretty much as we make them in the rest of life” (485). In other words, the ethics of reading (and writing) texts shares a great deal with the ethics of dealing with other humans. In fact, in “real world” terms, such ethics are inseparable—for example, the human costs of irresponsible representations of Mormons, particularly in early Church history but continuing to the present day, have been significant and tragic. Booth titles his book *The Company We Keep*, a clear comparison of texts to humans. This principle can guide ethical interaction from all sides of literature, suggesting, as it does, that there is always more to that text or character or writer than meets the eye. The closer one

examines and gets to know another individual person or text, the less likely one is to make rash judgments. This relates both to Levinas, who understands this fundamental and ultimately ineffable difference between the observer and the “other,” and to Said, who excoriates those who would create an artificial other in order to “understand” that person or society. Perhaps ironically, the more one knows about an individual or a text, the more one realizes how little he “understands” that other person, and the more forgiving one is inclined to be. This is not to say that one accepts all companions as equally valuable, but, Booth continues, “we must both open ourselves to ‘others’ that look initially dangerous or worthless, and yet prepare ourselves to cast them off whenever, after keeping company with them, we conclude that they are potentially harmful . . . by taking thought about *who* and *where we are*, and about *when it is*, we may improve our chances of finding and dwelling with those others who are in fact our true friends” (488-89). We allow our truest friends, because they are friends, to challenge us the most, both in literature and in life.

## Works Cited

- Armstrong, Paul B. "Being 'Out of Place': Edward W. Said and the Contradictions of Cultural Differences." *Modern Language Quarterly* 64 (2003): 97-121.
- Arrington, Leonard J. and Haupt, Jon. "Intolerable Zion: The Image of Mormonism in Nineteenth Century American Literature." *Western Humanities Review* 22 (1968): 243-60.
- Austin, Michael F. "The Function of Mormon Literary Criticism at the Present Time." *Dialogue* 28 (1994): 131-144. *Mormon Literature and Creative Arts*. 19 December 2006 <<http://humanities.byu.edu/mldb/austin01.htm>>.
- Beatty, Richmond Croom. *Bayard Taylor: Laureate of the Gilded Age*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1936.
- Bloom, Harold. *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation*. New York: Simon Schuster, 1992.
- Booth, Wayne C. *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988.
- Bunker, Gary L. and Bitton, Davis. *The Mormon Graphic Image, 1834-1914*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983.
- Burton, Gideon. "Keeping Company with Wayne Booth: Ethical Responsibility and the Conduct of Mormon Criticism." *Annual of the Association for Mormon Letters, 1996: Papers from 1994-95* Provo, Utah: Association for Mormon Letters, 1996: 27-35. *Mormon Literature and Creative Arts*. 2 June 2007 <<http://mldb.byu.edu/95/burton-booth.htm>>.

---. "Should We Ask, 'Is This Mormon Literature?': Towards a Mormon Criticism."

*Dialogue* 32.3 (1999): 33-43. *Mormon Literature and Creative Arts*. 2 June 2007

<<http://humanities.byu.edu/mldb/gbask.htm>>.

Burton, Gideon and Kramer, Neal. "The State of Mormon Literature and Criticism."

*Dialogue* 32.3 (1999): 1-12.

Bushman, Richard L. *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*. New York: Vintage books, 2007.

Cary, Richard. *The Genteel Circle: Bayard Taylor and His New York Friends*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952.

Cornwall, Marie, Heaton, Tim B., and Young, Lawrence A., eds. *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994.

Clancy, Tom. *Clear and Present Danger*. New York : Berkley, 1990, c1989

Cracroft, Richard H. "Attuning the Authentic Mormon Voice: Stemming the Sophic Tide in LDS Literature." *Sunstone* 16 (1993): 51-57. *Mormon Literature and Creative Arts*. 2 June 2007 <<http://mldb.byu.edu/attune.htm>>.

England, Eugene, "Danger on the Right! Danger on the Left! The Ethics of Recent Mormon Fiction." *Dialogue* 32.3 (1999): 13-32.

---. "Whipple's *The Giant Joshua*: The Greatest but Not the Great Mormon Novel."

*Annual of the Association for Mormon Letters* 14 (2001): 60-68.

Farhi, Paul. "'Seinfeld' Comic Richards Apologizes for Racial Rant." *Washington Post Online* 21 November 2006. 19 December 2006

<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/11/21/AR2006112100242.html>>.

Gardner, John. *Mickelsson's Ghosts*. New York: Knopf, 1982.

Geary, Edward A. "Mormondom's Lost Generation: the Novelists of the 1940s." *BYU Studies* 18 (1977): 89-98. 2 June 2007 <<http://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/cgi-bin/docviewer.exe?CISOROOT=/byustudies&CISOPTR=583&CISOSHOW=569>>.

Givens, Terryl. *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy*. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.

Gross, Terry. "Writer Walter Kirn, on a 'Mission to America.'" *Fresh Air*. WHYY, Philadelphia. 19 October 2005. 19 December 2006 <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4964686&ft=1&f=1033>>.

Hansen-Taylor, Marie, and Scudder, Horace E., eds. *Life and Letters of Bayard Taylor, Vol. II*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1885.

Jacobson, Matthew Frye. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Jorgensen, Bruce W. "Retrospection: Giant Joshua." *Sunstone* 12 (1978): 6-8.

---. "To Tell and Hear Stories: Let the Stranger Say." *Sunstone* 16 (1993): 41-50. *Mormon Literature and Creative Arts*. 2 June 2007 <<http://mldb.byu.edu/totell.htm>>.

Karem, Jeff. *The Romance of Authenticity: The Cultural Politics of Regional and Ethnic Literatures*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004.

Kirn, Walter. *Mission to America*. New York : Doubleday, 2005.

---. "Planetarium." *My Hard Bargain*. New York: Knopf, 1990. 3-12.

- . "Whole Other Bodies." *My Hard Bargain*. New York: Knopf, 1990. 53-58.
- . "Walking a Mile in Their Shoes." *Time Online* 4 Aug. 1997. 31 May 2007  
<[http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=13209968&sid=2&Fmt=3&clientId=9338  
&RQT=309&VName=PQD](http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=13209968&sid=2&Fmt=3&clientId=9338&RQT=309&VName=PQD)>.
- Kramer, Neal. "Heart, Mind, and Soul: The Ethical Foundation of Mormon Letters." *Dialogue* 32.3 (1999): 93-112.
- Lambert, Neal. "Saints, Sinners, and Scribes: A Look at the Mormons in Fiction." *Utah Historical Quarterly* 36 (1968): 63-76.
- Larsen, Kent S., II. Rev. of "Mormon Eden," by Walter Kirn. *The AML-List Review Archive* 9 June 1997. 1 June 2007 <<http://www.aml-online.org/reviews/b/B199725.html>>.
- Le Carré, John. *The Russia House*. New York: Knopf, 1989.
- Levinas, Emmanuel. *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 1985.
- . *Is It Righteous to Be?* Ed. Jill Robbins. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2001.
- Mauss, Armand. "Refuge and Retrenchment: The Mormon Quest for Identity." *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives*. Eds. Marie Cornwall, Tim Heaton, and Lawrence Young. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994. 24-42.
- McArthur, Benjamin. "Millennial Fevers." *Reviews in American History* 24.3 (1996): 369-382. *Project Muse*. 2 June 2007.  
<[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/reviews\\_in\\_american\\_history/v024/24.3mcarthur.html#top](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/reviews_in_american_history/v024/24.3mcarthur.html#top)>.

- Mitchell, W.J.T. "Representation." *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995. 11-22.
- Mordell, Albert, ed. *Literary Reviews and Essays by Henry James*. New York: Vista House, 1957.
- O'Donnell, Patrick. "Engendering Paranoia in Contemporary Narrative." *boundary 2* 19 (1992): 181-204.
- Pierce, Scott D. "'The Mormons' on PBS takes aim at stereotypes." *Deseret News Online*. 14 January 2007. 4 June 2007  
<<http://deseretnews.com/dn/view/0,1249,650222861,00.html>>.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. 1978. New York: Vintage, 1979.
- . "Orientalism Reconsidered." *Cultural Critique* 1 (1985): 89-107. *JSTOR*. 2 June 2007  
<<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0882-4371%28198523%290%3A1%3C89%3AOR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-6>>
- Schwartz, Thomas D. "Bayard Taylor's *The Prophet*: Mormonism as Literary Taboo; Calaveras County Comes of Age; The Erosion of Belief in the Poetry of Clinton F. Larson." Thesis. Brigham Young U, 1972.
- . "Bayard Taylor's 'The Prophet': Mormonism as Literary Taboo." *BYU Studies* 14 (1974): 235-47.
- Sollors, Werner. *Beyond Ethnicity : Consent and Descent in American Culture*. Cary, NC: Oxford University Press, 1987. 2 June 2007  
<<http://site.ebrary.com/lib/byuprovo/Top?id=10086803&layout=document>>.
- . "Ethnicity." *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995. 288-305.

- Taylor, Bayard. *The Prophet: A Tragedy*. Boston: James R. Osgood & Co., 1874.
- Taylor, Bayard. *The Lands of the Saracens*. New York: G.P. Putnam, 1888.
- Vincent, Leon H. *American Literary Masters*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1906.
- Wermuth, Paul C. *Bayard Taylor*. New York: Twayne, 1973.
- Woodlee, Yolanda. "D.C. Mayor Acted 'Hastily,' Will Rehire Aide." *Washington Post Online*. 4 February 1999. 14 May 2007 <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/local/longterm/williams/williams020499.htm>>.
- Whipple, Maurine. *The Giant Joshua*. 1941. Salt Lake City: Western Epics, 1976.