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# "Provident Living": Ethnography, Material Culture, and the Performance of Mormonism in Everyday Life

*Danille Elise Christensen*

I AM A FOLKLORIST, trained at Indiana University in the ethnographic and comparative study of verbal art, material culture, and customary behavior. Folklorists explore the vernacular practices and cultural forms that establish, maintain, and transform collectivities; that is, we're curious about the patterned things people make, say, and do in everyday life to communicate who they are, what they value, and where they belong. In the 1960s, folklorists began to shift away from cataloging narrative variants and tracing the origins of antiquities and toward the observation of what is termed "folklore in use." Scholars with backgrounds in rhetoric, sociolinguistics, and anthropology championed more precise attention to the social, temporal, geographic, ideological, and aesthetic contexts relevant to any particular instantiation of "lore." We hold that expressive culture—distinctively shaped play, talk, worship, and labor—is socially constitutive, rather than merely decorative or utilitarian. In other words, as a folklorist, if you study religion, you study *lived* religion.

I am also a Mormon—granddaughter of nineteenth-century stalwarts who migrated at great personal cost to Utah's Wasatch Front—and this fact has some bearing on my chosen discipline. Mormons "get" the

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social and symbolic importance of expressive practice.<sup>1</sup> In fact, a number of my folklore colleagues come from strong religious backgrounds, whether or not they continue to practice all prescribed forms of religiosity in their personal lives.<sup>2</sup> This convergence is hardly surprising, since religious boundaries are marked by high-context rituals and reinforced through individual and family practice: performative displays of adherence and devotion are key rhetorical tools of religion.<sup>3</sup>

Still, I've resisted turning an academic eye on Mormon culture. In part, my reluctance stems from the fact that the folkloristic study of Mormonism—which has centered on cultural exceptionalism in the Intermountain West—has not been the study of people I recognize from my own life as a practicing Latter-day Saint.<sup>4</sup> As a child growing up in the Midwest, I felt little kinship with those we called “Utah Mormons”—my

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1. Tom Mould and Eric Eliason have noted that folklore study has received unusually strong institutional support in Utah's public and private educational institutions, especially by scholars with some personal connection to the LDS Church. See their essay “The State of Mormon Folklore Studies,” *Mormon Studies Review* 1 (2014): 29–51.

2. I remember laughing with fellow IU folklore graduate students about how many Jewish, Catholic, Mormon, and Muslim-identified students were gathered around a seminar table one day.

3. On (everyday) ritual performance among Mormons, see, for instance, Jennifer Huss Basquiat, “Embodied Mormonism: Performance, Vodou, and the LDS Faith in Haiti,” *Dialogue* 37/4 (2004): 1–34; Rachel W. Loser et al., “Perceived Benefits of Religious Rituals in the Latter-day Saint Home,” *Review of Religious Research* 50/3 (2009): 345–62; and Loren D. Marks and David C. Dollahite, “‘Don't Forget Home': The Importance of Sacred Ritual in Families,” in *Understanding Religious Ritual: Theoretical Approaches and Innovations*, ed. John P. Hoffman (New York: Routledge, 2012), 186–203. Personal familiarity with lived religion means that scholars bring a certain amount of cultural baggage to the field site: cultural insiders have an immediate interpretive advantage but may be unable to tease out contextual threads or connect them to broader histories and practices; outsiders may be able to identify a “big picture” but be too quick to interpret what they see in terms of their own personal experience elsewhere.

4. Nearly all the articles collected in Eric Eliason and Tom Mould's recent *Latter-day Lore* are written by academically trained folklorists, anthropologists, or cultural geographers who themselves live and teach in the West, primarily in Utah (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2013); see also Jill Terry Rudy, “Mormon Folklore Studies,” in *Folklore in Utah: A History and Guide to Resources*, ed. David Stanley (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2004), 142–52.

siblings and I gently mocked the speech cadences that young missionaries picked up during their training in Provo, rolled our eyes at hymns that included phrases like “firm as the mountains around us,” wondered at the elaborate prom proposals cooked up by relatives out West. Later, I came to love the environmental diversity of the region and appreciate local idiosyncrasies, learned in my late twenties to prune fruit trees at my in-laws’ orchards near American Fork Canyon. But Utah—indeed, the whole contiguous Mormon Corridor—has always felt foreign to me. Not just the dry cool of summer nights and the absurdity of dusty corrals abutting outsized French Provincial or Italianate homes, but also the sense of assumption and assuredness that comes with cultural dominance. As something of an anomaly in my central Ohio high school, I chose to concentrate more on finding common ground than on emphasizing difference. And in more recent years I have also felt keenly my own intersectionality as a (divorced, childless) woman, a Midwesterner, a university professor, a person whose politics are left of center: being LDS is an important part of my identity, but not the only one. Even though my dissertation centered on the rhetorical framings made possible by the scrapbook as a material and social form—and thus included some fieldwork in Utah Valley, a mecca for the modern scrapbook industry—the majority of my graduate work was not Mormon-centric.

Latter-day Saints keep cropping up in my work, though. Sometimes it’s because an LDS example can illustrate the benefits of deeply engaged fieldwork. Evaluated against more charismatic performance styles, for instance, Mormon testimony meetings (especially in the United States) may come off as dull, impotent, boring—or even as the enactment of disempowerment.<sup>5</sup> Yet expressive forms similar in style, structure, or even name may stem from divergent belief systems or be mobilized to different ends; thus similar forms may *mean* differently depending

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5. See Elaine J. Lawless, “‘I Know If I Don’t Bear My Testimony I’ll Lose It’: Why Mormon Women Bother to Speak at All,” *Kentucky Folklore Record* 30/3–4 (1984): 79–96.

on context of use.<sup>6</sup> Though not always artistically arresting, simple or unrehearsed speech has been valued historically among members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—especially those with New England roots—as a marker both of humility and of authentic spiritual experience; comparative work on genre and language ideologies (including norms of interpretation and “ground rules for performing”) can thus shed light on the political efficacy of even “plain” language.<sup>7</sup> Just as biologists cannot assume that all things called “daisies” or “red-fish” are morphologically identical, so too students of culture should be on the lookout for emic distinctions in interpretation and use, especially when investigating everyday practices that *seem* familiar enough in terms of their own etic categories.

As I’ve worked to understand the ways and reasons that people shape words, actions, and things in the course of daily life, I’ve also been drawn to moments when apparently commonplace activities within LDS practice and discourse—sharing personal narratives, making scrapbooks, praising the homegrown and the handcrafted—bubble up in American popular culture more generally. If I have engaged with Mormon studies, then, it has been to consider “Mormonism [as a way to] comprehend things non-Mormon.”<sup>8</sup> In what follows, I ask

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6. Roger D. Abrahams, “Introductory Remarks to a Rhetorical Theory of Folklore,” *Journal of American Folklore* 81/320 (1968): 143–58; and Robert Plant Armstrong, *The Affecting Presence: An Essay in Humanistic Anthropology* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 13.

7. Richard Bauman, *Let Your Words Be Few: Symbolism of Speaking and Silence among Seventeenth-Century Quakers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Dell Hymes, *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974), 60; and Richard Bauman, *Verbal Art as Performance* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1977, 1984), 28–30. For more on LDS language ideologies and the performance of testimony, see Danille Elise Christensen, “I Bear Witness . . . : Truth, the Person, and the Word in Latter-day Saint Discursive Practice,” unpublished manuscript, 2004; compare Tom Mould, *Still, the Small Voice: Narrative, Personal Revelation, and the Mormon Folk Tradition* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2011).

8. J. Spencer Fluhman, “Friendship: An Editor’s Introduction,” *Mormon Studies Review* 1 (2014): 6.

how students of Mormon folklore might productively build on existing historical and folkloristic data from the Intermountain West in order to connect practices among Latter-day Saints to broader social, political, and cultural discussions.<sup>9</sup> I encourage increased attention to those practices that seem transparently religious but are in fact more complicated mixes of cultures, places, choices, and histories. At the same time, I hope for more research investigating the nuances of LDS theology that give vernacular practice a Mormon twist, especially with regard to beliefs concerning materiality and materialism.

### Beyond ritual: work and worship

Though ritual is perhaps the most obvious aspect of religion in action, I hope that attention to lived religion within Mormonisms encompasses more than ritual—or even materialization of ideology via iconology.<sup>10</sup> What's interesting to me about Mormon expressive practice is that much of the ideological, metaphysical, or "religious" work gets done in ways that might seem simply practical, their sacred meanings not

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9. For instance, folklorists can draw on their field's strong tradition of comparative study in order to discover how official or regional Mormon principles, concepts, and activities are selected as meaningful or discarded as peripheral in new or different contexts. Comparative thoughts about Pioneer Day celebrations outside Utah point in this direction; see Eric A. Eliason, "Beyond Deseret: An Introduction to Mormon Folklore in an International Context," *Latter-day Lore*, 405–14. Examples of studies that contribute to broader discourses within the field of cultural geography include Samuel A. Smith, "The Cities of Zion? Mormon and Non-Mormon Town Plans in the U.S. Mountain West, 1847–1930," *Journal of Historical Geography* 50 (October 2015): 1–13; and P. Starrs, "Meetinghouses in the Mormon Mind: Ideology, Architecture, and Turbulent Streams of an Expanding Church," *Geographical Review* 99/3 (2009): 323–55.

10. Folklorists have produced a rich body of work about Mormon symbols inscribed on everyday items, including quilts, woven rugs and throws, furniture, buildings, signage, and tombstones. For overviews see Susan Oman and Richard Oman, "Mormon Iconography," in *Utah Folk Art: A Catalog of Material Culture*, ed. Hal Cannon (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1980), 110–25; Eliason and Mould, *Latter-day Lore*; and Mould and Eliason, "State of Mormon Folklore Studies."

transparent to insiders or outsiders because they are so deeply embedded in workaday life.

Following Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's thoughts on what she referred to as "the significance of trivia," and acknowledging a disciplinary predilection to seek out the apparently outmoded or inconsequential, I believe that folklorists can add to Mormon studies by offering thoughts on the aesthetics and values that shape routine behaviors among Latter-day Saints, including housework, kinwork (e.g., family reunions and other forms of network management), care work, agricultural work, and other kinds of manual labor.<sup>11</sup> Such a focus could begin to tease out how much of LDS talk about the value of (unpaid) labor is distinctively Mormon in terms of doctrinal underpinnings and how much of rhetoric and practice reflects the adoption or adaptation of other discourses.<sup>12</sup>

The need for this kind of research hit home in late July 2013 as journalist Emily Matchar sat warily across the table from comedian-pundit Stephen Colbert while he quizzed her before a live studio audience. The show was *The Colbert Report*, the book in question *Homeward Bound*. Matchar described her work as an exploration of "the new domesticity"

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11. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "The Significance of Trivia," *Journal of Mormon History* 19/1 (1993): 52–66. Useful sources on these topics include Judith Levin, "Why Folklorists Should Study Housework," in *Feminist Theory and the Study of Folklore*, ed. Susan Tower Hollis, Linda Pershing, and M. Jane Young (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 285–96; and Michael Owen Jones, *Exploring Folk Art: Twenty Years of Thought on Craft, Work, and Aesthetics* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1993). Helpful historical contextualizations of gendered domestic labor include Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982); Micaela di Leonardo, "The Female World of Cards and Holidays: Women, Families, and the Work of Kinship," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 12/3 (1987): 440–53; Emily K. Abel, *Hearts of Wisdom: American Women Caring for Kin, 1850–1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Madonna Harrington Meyer, ed., *Care Work: Gender, Labor, and the Welfare State* (New York: Routledge, 2000); and Amy Mattson Lauters, *More Than a Farmer's Wife: Voices of American Farm Women, 1910–1960* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009).

12. For example, James Burkhart Gilbert, *Work without Salvation: America's Intellectuals and Industrial Alienation, 1880–1910* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); and Edward Deming Andrews and Faith Andrews, *Work and Worship: The Economic Order of the Shakers* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1974).

a broad social trend in which women and men were “re-embracing lost domestic arts and practices”—knitting, canning, home poultry production, and other DIY (do-it-yourself) efforts. Her book explains this movement as a response to a variety of contemporary ills, including exploitive workplaces, stressed pocketbooks, fears about food safety and environmental collapse, and the disconnect between mass production and aesthetic pleasure. But when Colbert asks about the politics of these practices (“is this a hippy-dippy, like crunchy-granola commune, love-baby [thing]?”), Matchar responds by sketching a contrast. Certainly there are the “typical lefty liberal *Portlandia* caricatures who are pickling everything,” she says; but some participants are “very conservative—you have, you know, very religious, you know, Mormon housewives, in Provo, Utah, who are selling scarves on Etsy, so it really crosses a lot of these lines.”<sup>13</sup>

As I read Matchar’s book, I realized that this example, thrown out in the course of an on-air conversation, was not randomly chosen: Mormons generally occupy a singular space on the “extreme right” when they’re mentioned in the volume, a convenient way to illustrate various divides. Her chapter “Strange Bedfellows,” for instance, clusters connotations about belief, gender, aesthetics, and class when it references the apparently odd circumstance of “Mormon stay-at-home-mom bloggers sharing recipes with atheist hipster foodies.” Positioning Mormonism as a conservative monolith, Matchar slips easily among dogma, culture, place, and history. “Mormons and New Domesticity go together like (homemade) bread and butter,” she observes. In “cultures where mothers are expected to stay at home no matter what” (and assuming that such women are “already knitting and making soap”), she concludes that online sales through sites like Etsy must be both natural and nonthreatening. Briefly explaining why DIY production might appeal to Mormons, she notes that motherhood is a calling and that “baking bread and sewing curtains was a simple matter of necessity” for western forebears, then suggests that a “major

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13. *The Colbert Report*, July 31, 2013, <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/ngxjwr/the-colbert-report-emily-matchar>; and Emily Matchar, *Homeward Bound: Why Women Are Embracing the New Domesticity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013).



culture of gardening, home canning, and from-scratch cooking” has been fostered by LDS Church recommendations regarding emergency food storage. (In fact, meals produced by American Latter-day Saints from stored emergency food—unless they use wheat—are likely to include quite a lot of freeze-dried or otherwise processed foodstuffs, such as commercially canned soup.)<sup>14</sup>

Like Matchar, I am fascinated by the broad range of political positions that people hold within the world of DIY, and, indeed, with regard to the handmade and the handcrafted in particular. But she errs in painting Mormon women with a broad stroke and in not teasing out what relationship religion actually has to lived experience. For instance, a broader emphasis on entrepreneurship within the state of Utah stems from a historical, rather than strictly doctrinal, emphasis on home production; efforts to keep Territorial- and Depression-era Utah economically self-sufficient surely contribute to the fact that today’s Utah is also the land of multilevel marketing, cottage industry, and alternative economies. Furthermore, Mormon women have been leveraging income from home for a long time: in 1936, a year before the church-sponsored Mormon Handicraft consignment shop opened, author Sylvia R. Grant wrote to the *Relief Society Magazine* about “work done by women who live within a two mile radius of my door.” She remarked on the satisfactions of generating a cash income, noting that “there are dozens of different ways to earn money for either necessities or extras and it is considered smart to be able to do so.” The projects of her Utah neighbors included producing cakes, chicken pies and rolls, canapés, Thanksgiving dinners, and pressure-canned vegetables (using children to distribute these goods locally); starting in-home tea rooms or gift shops; crafting artificial flowers for department stores; knitting dresses; hemstitching; advertising by telephone for coal, facials, or magazine subscriptions;

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14. One short vignette of an LDS blogger in *Homeward Bound* is a bit more nuanced; “Amy” is described both as a “hipster” concerned with the aesthetics and social impact of food and craft and as a “faithful Mormon stay-at-home mom”—however, Matchar uses words like *but* and *remarkably* to register surprise at such a convergence. Matchar, *Homeward Bound*, 213–14, 222–24.

addressing envelopes; "kodak finishing" in basement darkrooms; refinishing or remaking furniture; beginning "nursery school" or tutoring programs; and finally, if all else failed, convalescent or child care.<sup>15</sup>

Historical documents, and the historians who locate and explicate them, have thus contributed much to our understandings of what people wore, ate, sang, made, and wrote in Utah's past, and indeed how those everyday practices helped to forge "community and commitment" among new Mormon settlers in the nineteenth century.<sup>16</sup> But ethnographic inquiry—long-term observation, qualitative engagement with participants—can help to make subtle patterns and theological influences clearer by attending to the ways people talk about these practices in the present *and* by reading the structure and style of behaviors themselves as a way to identify insights that go beyond verbalized discourse. How have shifts in official pronouncements about wage work for women, for instance, corresponded to the actual production and exchange practices of Latter-day Saints?<sup>17</sup> What does "stay-at-home mom" mean in the context of powerful community volunteering and successful entrepreneurship? How might an emphasis on artistic production mask the economic salience of the homemade and the handcrafted? In addition, I welcome more ethnographic work that focuses on the actual modes and rhythms of labor—paid and unpaid—among Latter-day Saints around the world, studies that illuminate work and worship in relation to gender, class, national origin, and other factors.

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15. Sylvia R. Grant, "Pin Money or Better," *Relief Society Magazine* 23/9 (September 1936): 572–73. Women's co-ops had existed in Utah since the nineteenth century; see Carol L. Clark, "Mormon Handicraft," *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:936–37.

16. See, for example, Ronald W. Walker and Doris R. Dant, eds., *Nearly Everything Imaginable: The Everyday Life of Utah's Mormon Pioneers* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1999).

17. Vella Neil Evans, "Mormon Women and the Right to Wage Work," *Dialogue* 23/4 (1990): 45–61.

## Provident living: material displays

Then, too, I hope for increased examination of the faith's orientation toward the material world more generally. In an 1854 essay based on coverage in the *Edinburgh Review*, one commentator in a Maine newspaper noted (with disgust) the “materialism” of Mormonism, a problem that he saw as going beyond even the heresy of a corporeal God.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, founder Joseph Smith taught that “all spirit is [refined] matter,” a formulation that challenges traditional Western divisions and that has been repeated more recently by LDS apostle Dieter Uchtdorf, who in October 2011 characterized “the temporal and the spiritual” as inseparable sides of a coin.<sup>19</sup> How and when has the idea that matter *matters* influenced daily life choices among adherents to Smith's teachings? Why, for instance, has a supposed reverence for God's creations—an ethic “prevalent virtually in every corner of Latter-day Saint revelations and scriptures”—not translated into more active environmental stewardship discourse and practice, even within institutions like Young Women Camp, websites devoted to “provident living,” and the long-standing tradition of family gardening?<sup>20</sup>

In a related vein, how and when does a materialist perspective shift into materialism in the contemporary sense and into conspicuous consumption and display? I suspect that proselytizing efforts and caricaturization in the popular press during the nineteenth century fomented a

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18. The writer contended that Mormon emphasis on “political or business harangues,” “marches and waltzes,” the corporeality and “indefinite development” of God, and the expansion of Mormon families (in number and space) left no room for “prayer, self-examination, or repentance,” no “aspirations after communion with God, spirituality of mind, or purification of the affections.” See Edward L. Elwell, ed., “Tenets of Mormonism,” in *Portland [ME] Transcript*, 3 June 1854.

19. See Doctrine and Covenants 131:7; 2 Nephi 9:39; and Dieter F. Uchtdorf, “Providing in the Lord's Way,” *Ensign*, November 2011.

20. George B. Handley, “The Environmental Ethics of Mormon Belief,” *BYU Studies* 40/2 (2001): 205. Curiously, until recently the LDS Church had not taken a strong official position on environmental sustainability. See “Environmental Stewardship and Conservation,” <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/environmental-stewardship-conservation> (accessed November 7, 2013).

persistent double consciousness (“how am I being perceived?”) that has lasted beyond the Americanization period of the LDS Church’s history.<sup>21</sup> For instance, in 1946 the sense of being observed with (potentially hostile) curiosity spurred *Salt Lake Tribune* garden editor Hazel Moyle to advocate widespread (and semiotically loaded) flower gardening. A year before the Pioneer Centennial, she noted that because “the limelight of the world” would be upon Utah during the celebratory Covered Wagon Days in 1947, Utahns should spiff up “shabby or unadorned” homes and yards with hollyhocks, daisies, phlox, and iris, giving special attention to flowers that would bloom midsummer, during the height of the touristic gaze. Such efforts would stand as proof of industry and conciliation: they would serenely “prove that we have truly made the desert blossom as the rose” and offer a “friendly message of peace and beauty” to “the stranger within our gates.”<sup>22</sup> Surely the elaborate gardens at Temple Square, the demonstrations of self-sufficiency at Welfare Square, the outpouring of volunteer labor during the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City, and the growth of visually impressive gated communities reflect some of these same motivations, concerns, and aesthetics. I also wonder at the prevalence of plastic surgery, cosmetic enhancement, and diet supplements along the Mormon Corridor compared to other regions of the world in which Mormon identity is not necessarily expected to be on display.<sup>23</sup>

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21. See Lawrence Foster’s thoughts on the late but thorough adoption of Victorian domestic ideals among Mormons at the end of the nineteenth century (“From Frontier Activism to Neo-Victorian Domesticity: Mormon Women in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” *Journal of Mormon History* 6 [January 1, 1979]: 3–21) and Ethan R. Yorgason’s examination of the Americanization of the Mormon West between 1880 and 1920 (*Transformation of the Mormon Culture Region* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003]).

22. Hazel D. Moyle, “Garden Making for Centennial Days,” *Relief Society Magazine*, August 1946, 517–21.

23. Marjorie Cortez, “Is Salt Lake Vainest City? Maybe We’re Just Insecure,” *DeseretNews.com*, December 18, 2007. Another recent article suggested that cosmetic surgery among Mormon women may also be a response to uneven sex ratios in local populations; Jon Birger, “What Two Religions Tell Us about the Modern Dating Crisis,” *Time*, August 24, 2015.

Finally, in the context of Joseph Smith's stance that "all spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure" (D&C 131:7), what does *secularization* mean? Secular and sacred could be considered in terms of the same fractal relationship that linguist Susan Gal has applied to notions of public/private—as a relative rather than absolute dichotomy.<sup>24</sup> How are distinctions among sacred and secular calibrated in LDS discourse, and how does this compare to the actual marking of sacred and secular space in practice? One might think, for instance, of the ways homes, meetinghouses, boweries, chapels, and temples are designed and treated differently (or not) and why, in terms of form, decoration, maintenance, and use.

### Looking outward: Mormon practice as illustrative

Though my own work has necessarily engaged existing scholarship that's grounded in LDS population centers, my primary interest continues to be the ways that Latter-day Saint religious discourse and action articulate with broader cultural ideas or approaches to the world. For instance, though my current book project—a cultural history of home canning in the United States—grew out of my own family's experience, it is not a book about Mormon canning; instead, I explore the ways that ideas about deception, science, manual labor, scarcity, nation, beauty, gender, and change are filtered through the rhetoric surrounding this one lived practice shared by many communities, past and present.<sup>25</sup>

LDS topics and examples add more than local color or variety to the manuscript, however. They stimulate new questions about, for instance, the relationship of canning to socioeconomic class in the twentieth century. Cookbooks, magazines, records of fairs and bazaars, and even marketing research that was conducted in the late 1910s demonstrate how fancy cooked preserves have been linked to social status throughout the United States: homemade jams and (especially) jellies were

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24. Susan Gal, "A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13/1 (2002): 77–95.

25. Danille Elise Christensen, *Freedom from Want: Home Canning in the American Imagination* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, forthcoming).

markers of skill, artistry, and hospitality, even as urban populations and the rising middle class took readily to commercially canned staples at the turn of the nineteenth century. Home canning in quantity, however, became associated with rural spaces and material necessity, a perception that persists to this day.<sup>26</sup> But the diaries of Isabella “Belle” Wilson Hales (1889–1963)—written in central urban Utah between 1941 and 1962—and the letters of Lillie Liston Baker (1884–1960)—penned from southern rural Utah in the 1950s—document instances in which high-volume canning is positively linked to high social status, in part because of the regional and religious contexts in which Hales and Baker lived. Hales was a leader of numerous women’s organizations in Provo, Utah, and the wife of Brigham Young University dean Wayne B. Hales; she canned extensively, keeping an especially thorough record of her home production in the 1940s.<sup>27</sup> Baker, a mother to seven and manager of several hired hands, hosted nearly every sacred and secular visitor that came to Boulder, Utah, at mid-century, where her husband Claude was a leading figure in the LDS Church and, among other duties, distributed grazing permits, hauled the mail from Escalante by mule, and established irrigation and road projects. Literally until the end of Lillie Baker’s life, food production and preservation organized both her attention and her social life; her letters are filled with references to growing, putting up, and distributing garden produce.<sup>28</sup>

It’s fascinating to tease out the many cultural strands that are foregrounded as these women and those around them talk about strategies

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26. Danille Elise Christensen, “Simply Necessity? Agency and Aesthetics in Southern Home Canning,” *Southern Cultures* 21/1 (2015): 15–42.

27. MSS 11, Women’s Manuscript Collections, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. In his own published documents, Wayne Hales highlights the food preservation prowess of both Belle and his second wife, Vivian Parkinson, a domestic science teacher whom he married in 1965 after Belle’s death from cancer; Parkinson was known even in advanced age to forage for chokecherries in order to make jelly. Wayne B. Hales, *My Life Story*, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

28. MSS 1682, The Claude Vincent and Lillie Liston Baker Collection, 20th Century Western and Mormon Americana, L. Tom Perry Special Collections.

for home provisioning. I am left to wonder: what role does scripture and doctrine play in this everyday talk about self-reliance and home production, and in what sense is LDS home food production simply a sustained engagement with a broader American agrarianism or a capitalist ethic founded on the husbanding of excess resources?

### Going forward: community, change, and the relevance of folklore studies

As they draw on the range of theories and methods that have emerged from dynamic disciplinary engagements with philology, literary studies, anthropology, and art history—e.g., comparative textual analysis, ethnographic attention to contexts, rhetorical attention to form—folklorists have much to contribute to the field of Mormon studies, and to the study of lived religion more generally. Indeed, folklore studies is an area in which scholars and laypeople across political continuums can find their own common ground. The study of vernacular culture appeals to models of community advanced by both the political left and the political right: people of divergent political persuasions can often agree that small groups are the ideal social *form*, and face-to-face interaction the ideal *means*, for achieving positive social goals.

More conservative assessments tend to ground authentic community in relationships based on birth and place, where *small* means “homogeneous” and society is modeled after a biological family responsible for socializing its children, transmitting consistent social norms, and minimizing difference. This model of community as family (or neighborhood) values face-to-face contact that allows for “commutative justice”: one-on-one equity effected through the regulation of contractual obligations. Close contact allows for teaching, evaluation of just deserts, and reinforcement of desired behaviors by means of everyday cultural forms. For example, James Wind writes that churches and synagogues are able to “fill and then tap into deep imaginative reservoirs”

(which inspire future social engagement) by means of “practices, habits, attitudes, [and] rituals.”<sup>29</sup>

Calls for community from further left see smallness less as a method for social regulation than as a means for cultural enrichment. Relationships in this version of community cross boundaries of physical proximity—they may be based on ethnicity, occupation, or religion, for example—and smallness is considered a way of consolidating influence in the context of a pluralistic society. Here the focus is on intensifying a group’s sense of difference—with the ultimate aim of encouraging understanding and interdependence, but not necessarily uniformity. This model is key in the applied work of folklorists who attempt to promote “populist approaches to social difference and an anti-elitist concern with the lives and the well-being of ordinary individuals”;<sup>30</sup> it is also a model germane to the LDS Church as a diasporic, proselytizing, and globalizing lay institution. Face-to-face contact in these circumstances can be envisioned as a way to foster “imaginative justice”—the ability to espouse the interests of the Other as one works to understand the circumstances and envision the claims of that other.<sup>31</sup> Susan Yohn notes that nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries often began their work with the intention of assimilating “‘foreign’ or ‘exceptional’ populations” but concluded it as “vocal advocates” of those with whom they worked and lived.<sup>32</sup>

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29. James P. Wind, “Congregations and Leaders: Realities about America’s Primary Voluntary Religious Communities,” in *The Ethics of Giving and Receiving: Am I My Foolish Brother’s Keeper?*, ed. William F. May and A. Lewis Soens Jr. (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 2000), 125–26. In the same volume, see also Charles E. Curran, “The Nature of Philanthropy: A Response to Kass,” 38; Leon R. Kass, “Am I My Foolish Brother’s Keeper? Justice, Compassion, and the Mission of Philanthropy”; and Kass, “A Response to Curran, Lovin, and Sverdlik.”

30. Jessica M. Payne, “The Politicization of Culture in Applied Folklore,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 35/3 (1998): 252.

31. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr*, ed. D. B. Robertson (New York: Meridian Books, 1967).

32. Susan M. Yohn, “What Time, Money, and a ‘Calling’ Produced: A Comment on Women, Volunteering, and the Process of Social Reform,” in May and Soens Jr., *Ethics of Giving and Receiving*, 142, 146.



Both models of community have their critics; what is important here is that they suggest why folklorists have successfully wooed supporters from all points on the political spectrum—and perhaps why the study (and celebration) of vernacular expressive culture has been so popular among Mormons as well. Folklorists' public initiatives often promote unity in diversity; they combine a more conservative model of community as cohesive and mutually understandable with a more radical view of communities as multiple and potentially linked sites of social power. Mormons on the left can embrace folklore as populist, pluralist, and applied; those on the political right appreciate the recognition of local needs, interests, expertise, and particular histories.

As the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints continues to negotiate the efficacy of centralized management structures and to recognize the diversity of its members both within and without the United States—and to honor the complexity of individual members' identities, as in the "I'm a Mormon" campaign—folklorists and other scholars of living cultures can do much to (1) highlight the consequences and contradictions of everyday religious practice and community boundary marking; (2) work to address essentialisms in the discourse of insiders and outsiders; and (3) demonstrate how Mormon lives, in all their varieties, aid in thoughtful examination of the broader issues of the day.

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