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Abstract Review of *Dale Morgan On Early Mormonism: Correspondence and a New History* (1986), edited by John Phillip Walker.

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Reviewed by Gary F. Novak

**“The Most Convenient Form of Error”:
Dale Morgan on Joseph Smith and
the Book of Mormon**

We are only critical about the things we don't want to believe.¹

Dale L. Morgan

Maybe there was an Angel Moroni, and you [Fawn B.] and I are the merest sophists and rationalists unable to see plain facts before our eyes.²

Dale L. Morgan

I first heard of Dale Lowell Morgan in the spring of 1980. The previous fall, Louis Midgley had published “The Brodie

The phrase in the title of this review is borrowed from Carl Becker's “Everyman His Own Historian,” cited in Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 256.

¹ Dale L. Morgan to Fawn M. Brodie, 28 April 1947, Fawn McKay Brodie Papers, MS 360, bx 7, fld 9, p. 2, Manuscripts Division, University of Utah Marriott Library, Salt Lake City.

² Dale L. Morgan to Fawn M. Brodie, 29 September 1945, Brodie Papers, bx 7, fld 6, p. 1. Morgan had an ironic view of Mormon history. There is no reason to think that he took the possibility of angels delivering books seriously.

Connection: Thomas Jefferson and Joseph Smith,"³ in which he reported what many of the Jefferson experts had to say in the seventies about Fawn M. Brodie's *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate Biography* and then noted that many of their criticisms were very similar to what Mormons, especially Hugh Nibley, had been saying in the forties about her *No Man Knows My History*.⁴ Kent L. Walgren⁵ had written to Louis Midgley to complain that "The

³ Louis Midgley, "The Brodie Connection: Thomas Jefferson and Joseph Smith," *BYU Studies* 20/1 (Fall 1979): 59-67.

⁴ Fawn M. Brodie, *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate Biography* (New York: Norton, 1974). Hugh Nibley, "No, Ma'am, That's Not History: A Brief Review of Mrs. Brodie's Reluctant Vindication of a Prophet She Seeks to Expose," in *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass: The Art of Telling Tales about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young*, ed. David J. Whittaker (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 3-45. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Knopf, 1971). I will use the 11th printing, 1983, since the differences between printings are often significant (especially when dealing with crucial matters like the First Vision, the Book of Mormon, and the book of Abraham). For those who are familiar with the details of the history of her claims about these critical matters, this amounts to a delicious irony. Hugh Nibley also noted some of the similarities of the Jefferson reviews with "No Ma'am." Hugh Nibley, "A Note on F. M. Brodie," in *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass*, 49-52.

⁵ In the "Editor's Acknowledgments," Kent L. Walgren is credited with having alerted John Phillip Walker to the existence of Morgan's unfinished Mormon history in the Madeline Reeder McQuown papers at the University of Utah (p. vii). In addition, Walgren has published "Photography as History," review of *Through Camera Eyes*, by Nelson B. Wadsworth, *Dialogue* 10/3 (Spring 1977): 116-17; "Fast and Loose Freemasonry," review of *Mormonism and Freemasonry: The Illinois Lodge*, by Mervin B. Hogan, *Dialogue* 18/3 (Fall 1985): 172-76; and "Some Sentimental Thoughts on Leaving the Fold," *Dialogue* 13/4 (Winter 1980): 75-80. It is interesting to note that Walgren was probably working on this article at the same time he was spewing venom at Louis Midgley. Walgren explains that he went through a series of "spiritual struggle[s]" which caused him to leave the Church. First he saw "hypocritical zone leaders" during his mission, second he "felt battered" after he heard a professor attack some silly student opinions on the Constitution, and finally he felt "insecure" after discovering that "there were numerous versions of the First Vision which seemed to contradict each other." Walgren, "Some Sentimental Thoughts," 76-77. He goes on to explain that he "discovered the amiability of coffee, beer and wine" and "came to perceive" people like Eugene England, Richard Poll, Klaus Hansen, and Richard Bushman "as a coterie of intellectual chickens." Walgren, "Some Sentimental Thoughts," 79, 78. It is no wonder that he felt challenged when Midgley went after Brodie, who apparently—following

Brodie Connection" "should be required reading for students of the *non sequitur*: If scholars can find problems with *Thomas Jefferson*, there must also be serious problems with *No Man*."⁶ Walgren indicated that he thought "*No Man* has remained impenetrable all these years not so much because of Ms. Brodie's genius as because she had available to her a resource more valuable than any library in the world: Dale Morgan."⁷ Although Walgren claimed that Morgan helped Brodie by providing source material and by reading her manuscript, he did not demonstrate how that sort of help made her book "impenetrable."

Midgley saw the humor and the challenge of Walgren's attack on his article. He began his reply by noting the problem with the "Morgan-saves-Brodie-from-Brodie-like-stupidity-in-her-first-book thesis."⁸ "It is odd," Midgley noted, "that the greatest 'Mormon historian' never published anything and completed drafts of only four chapters of a book he promised for most of his adult life." "Does the fact that she had help or that she corresponded with people insure her infallibility? It is interesting to see the theory of an infallible Morgan appear when Brodie's errors begin to be made public."⁹ It seemed entirely improbable that Brodie's receiving help from Morgan would somehow save her Joseph Smith book from the *Thomas Jefferson* critics.

Walgren replied angrily to Midgley. To bolster his opinion that Morgan was "the best historian Mormonism has produced," Walgren referred Midgley to several of Morgan's bibliographies, Morgan's typescript of early newspaper articles on Mormonism, and a couple of biographies of what may be described as Old West figures. Walgren also referred Midgley to Morgan's unpublished papers in the Marriott Library at the University of Utah.¹⁰ All of this seemed intended to support Walgren's claims about Morgan's reputation, and perhaps, thereby, also Brodie's.

Walgren's chicken metaphor—was for him something of an intellectual wolf. For his discussion of how he "felt" the Book of Mormon "crumble" after reading *No Man Knows*, see Walgren, "Some Sentimental Thoughts," 77.

⁶ Kent L. Walgren to Louis Midgley, 6 March 1980; all citations from the Midgley-Walgren correspondence in my possession.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Louis Midgley to Kent L. Walgren, 17 March 1980, p. 4.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Kent L. Walgren to Louis Midgley, 22 March 1980, p. 2.

Of course Midgley recognized that Walgren's list of Morgan's papers hardly exempted Brodie from criticism. "Is there something in this correspondence," he asked, "that somehow shows that Brodie could not possibly be guilty of the kind of errors found in *Thomas Jefferson*?" "Do you really think the list of seven items you mentioned is grounds for ranking Morgan as *the best Mormon historian*? That list," Midgley noted, "wouldn't put Morgan in the top fifty." In an apparent attempt to explain Walgren's use of Morgan to defend Brodie, Midgley wondered, "Are you, by any chance, related to Morgan?"¹¹

By this time Walgren had had enough. "I decline your invitation to debate the competence of Dale Morgan for a different reason: It is apparent from your letter that you are unfamiliar with his work." Changing the emphasis from Morgan's help with *No Man Knows My History*, Walgren continued, "If, and when, you are ready to offer specific criticism of Morgan's work (which includes a list of books and articles as long as your arm), I will accept the bait." Addressing Midgley's final question, Walgren concluded: "I am not related to Morgan, nor did I ever meet him. My 'novel' opinion 'about Morgan's greatness' is based on my own study of his work."¹² Walgren was never willing or perhaps never able to explain how Morgan's correspondence with Brodie made *No Man Knows My History* "impenetrable."

When Walgren finally cut off the correspondence, Midgley rejoined that "it certainly would be easy for you to inform me about the contents of that [Morgan's] correspondence that presumably . . . [show] how Morgan kept Brodie from making errors." "If you can't show how Morgan is relevant to the issues you raised, then please leave him out of the discussion of Brodie. Morgan was your idea; all I did was ask you to show why he did for Brodie what you claimed, that is, put her beyond criticism for all these years."¹³ Midgley had the last word on the subject; Walgren abandoned the discussion he had begun, looking bad.

¹¹ Louis Midgley to Kent L. Walgren, 14 April 1980, p. 3.

¹² Kent L. Walgren to Louis Midgley, 17 April 1980, p. 1.

¹³ Louis Midgley to Kent L. Walgren, 28 April 1980, p. 5. Interestingly, John P. Walker, editor of *On Early Mormonism*, also wrote to Midgley to complain about "The Brodie Connection." John P. Walker to Louis Midgley, 7 April 1980; copy in my possession. Louis Midgley to John P. Walker, 21 April 1980;

Having enjoyed the private quarrel between Walgren and Midgley—it was fine entertainment—of course my interest was piqued when *On Early Mormonism* was finally published. If we exclude his bibliographical works, *On Early Mormonism* provides a useful compendium of Morgan's contributions to the study of the Mormon past. If the book had been competently compiled, it would have been possible to gauge Morgan's influence on Brodie and also the degree of his competence in Mormon history.

The book, *Dale Morgan On Early Mormonism*, containing fifty of Morgan's letters and the material he intended to include in his history of the Church, was published some three years before *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* first appeared. The current year, 1996, is the tenth anniversary of the *Review's* publication. The book richly deserves to be reviewed in these pages because it contains one of the earliest versions of what may justly be called the modern naturalistic explanation of Joseph Smith's prophetic charisms and the production of the Book of Mormon. "The Letters" include some of Morgan's most interesting letters concerning himself and Mormon things. They often contain personal items and are addressed to a variety of people, including Fawn Brodie, Juanita Brooks, Madeline Reeder McQuown, Francis W. Kirkham, and Stanley Ivins, among others. One would be hard put to select letters that were more interesting or more telling from Dale Morgan's vast correspondence.

The portion of the book titled "The History" contains the four chapters that Morgan completed and the three rough draft chapters of his projected multivolume Mormon history. The rough draft chapters required the editor to add "necessary transitions" (p. 218). "The History" contains, as Morgan's editor says, "a carefully conceived naturalistic explanation for the production of the Book of Mormon" (p. 217). Morgan's history ends abruptly with his analysis of the Book of Mormon. That analysis contains much of the same material that Fawn Brodie included in the first edition of *No Man Knows My History*, but which, no longer under the influence of Morgan, she seems to have abandoned or modified in favor of a psychological explanation in her

copy in my possession. Walker's correspondence, while arguing along much the same lines as Walgren, never mentioned Morgan.

second-edition "Supplement." Both sections of the book are faithful to the materials Morgan left behind. The few errors that have crept into the book are either obvious, inconsequential, or belong to Dale Morgan himself. An index, which the book lacks, would greatly improve its worth as a reference.

Portrait of the Historian as a Young Man¹⁴

Born in 1914, Dale Lowell Morgan wrote books, articles, and bibliographies on Western trappers, lakes, rivers, and trails. He claimed to have been "born into a thoroughly orthodox Mormon family" (p. 26)—he was, or at least claimed to be, the great grandson of Orson Pratt (p. 44)—and was, in his estimation, at least until his "fourteenth birthday, probably a more dutiful Mormon than the average—president of my quorum of deacons" (p. 26). When he was fourteen he lost his hearing through meningitis, an event that profoundly altered his life. He studied commercial art in high school and graduated from the University of Utah as an art major (p. 27). Morgan had wanted to "make a living in commercial art and advertising" (p. 27), but he was unable to find work. He was eventually employed by the Historical Records Survey of the Works Progress Administration in Ogden and spent most of his life working in libraries or archives.¹⁵

¹⁴ For those ready to conjure the specter of *ad hominem*, I must point out that I am not basing any kind of argument on the way in which Morgan lived his life. I am, in a way that Morgan himself could have appreciated, merely reporting "the facts as I find them." I am, as far as these things go, merely following the admonition of D. Michael Quinn: "If I were to write about any subject unrelated to religion, and I purposely failed to make reference to pertinent information of which I had knowledge, I would be justifiably criticized for dishonesty." D. Michael Quinn, "On Being a Mormon Historian (and Its Aftermath)," in *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History*, ed. George D. Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 76. Compare Quinn's opinion in his "Editor's Introduction," in *New Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), xiii n. 5.

¹⁵ The "Biographical Introduction" to *On Early Mormonism* contains useful information on Morgan's life, as does the brief survey in Davis Bitton and Leonard J. Arrington, *Mormons and Their Historians* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 115–19. For information on Morgan's life before 1942, see Richard Saunders, "'The Strange Mixture of Emotion and Intellect': A Social History of Dale L. Morgan, 1933–42," *Dialogue* 28/4 (Winter 1995): 39–58.

During his high school and college years Morgan went through "a period of adjustment" and ultimately lost his faith. "I could no longer believe the things I had formerly believed," he said, and did "not see the necessity of God in the scheme of things" (p. 28). Although he liked "to sketch nudes in pastel" and visited the University of Utah from time to time for that purpose (p. 27), did not believe in God, and thought Joseph Smith a conscious deceiver, he nonetheless described himself as "a better Mormon than those who go to church on Sunday and pay their tithing" (p. 28). The reason for this, he said, was his belief in what he called "the decencies of human relations" (p. 28)—his sort of secular faith. He portrayed himself as more tolerant than believing Mormons—"I don't ask that others believe or think as I do, but also ask that they try not to enforce their beliefs and thinking upon me" (p. 28)—but he did not, or could not, see the inconsistency of that position with his insistence on "certain imbecilities in the social development of the Mormon Church" and "the fanatic founders of the religion" (p. 28).

Morgan's hearing loss compelled him to conduct his conversations in writing. When he found himself in a group, questions to him had to be written down. He loved to write letters. Unlike normal participants in a group conversation, for example, when he met with Fawn Brodie, Bernard DeVoto, and Madeline Reeder McQuown, notes of the give-and-take of the discussion would have to be made for him since he could not read the lips of everyone who might be talking at a given moment. He was curious about his neighbors because, he said, "I don't become casually acquainted as most people do, and thus am left to my own fantasies to explain things people customarily pick up by a kind of social osmosis" (p. 189).

Morgan seems to have spent a good part of his adult life infatuated with Madeline Reeder McQuown. John Phillip Walker coyly refers to their relationship as "complex," but that hardly begins to describe their bizarre "thirty-five-year relationship" (p. 57). Morgan and McQuown had met while Morgan attended the University of Utah. Her first marriage to Jarvis Thurston ended

John Phillip Walker indicates that Morgan lost his hearing when he was thirteen (p. 7). Morgan's letter to Juanita Brooks indicates that he lost his hearing "in the summer of 1929," which would have made him fourteen.

in 1940 and she married Thomas McQuown in January 1941. Her marriage to McQuown did not stop Morgan from courting her.¹⁶ He sent her clothing ("I rather fancy myself as a selector [*sic*] of wardrobes for you," p. 55) and they exchanged erotic poetry and erotic, if not pornographic, semiautobiographical short stories.¹⁷ Many of Morgan's letters (now housed in the Madeline Reeder McQuown collection at the University of Utah) have portions of pages torn away, apparently censoring potentially sensitive materials. McQuown would mutilate Morgan's letters by simply tearing off the personal portions. She was not especially careful about this and would sometimes destroy either more or less than she intended. In some instances it is not possible to date a letter because that portion has been torn off, or the page with the date is simply missing. The collection contains folders full of torn pages that are little more than mere scraps.

McQuown did not have an entirely stable personality and, as might be expected, the relationship was at times stormy. She had at one time, on discovering she had cancer, intended to shoot

¹⁶ Among the more bizarre letters in the McQuown Collection is one that Morgan wrote during the time that Madeline was divorcing Thurston. Morgan's signature is crossed out and Madeline had written in pencil, "Tom Tom Tom Tom." The letter had been folded, and Madeline wrote Thomas McQuown's name and other gibberish on the back of the letter. It looks like something from a high school student, not a woman in her midthirties. Morgan to McQuown, 14 March 1940, Madeline Reeder McQuown Papers, bx 2, fld 1, p. 2, University of Utah Marriott Library, Salt Lake City.

¹⁷ Note especially where Morgan says "Even 18 hours later I still love you!" (p. 59). This sort of talk was not uncommon, "Damn it, why aren't you somewhere around, so I can buy a flower for you when the fancy takes me—or even grow one for you that we can enjoy together? Give me a good answer, if you can" (p. 73). Morgan complained about McQuown's insistence that he not put personal things in letters. "There are all sorts of personal things I might add before sending this off, but you do not like me to write to you very personal letters, dissatisfied though you are with any other kind, and this is a frustrating limitation indeed, which I only break out of now and then in a mood of defiance." Morgan to McQuown, 11 September 1951, McQuown Papers, bx 2, fld 8, p. 2. McQuown's letters to Morgan were nearly always signed "much love always." Note also Morgan's tender closing, "There are some nice things to remember, looking down over your shoulder while holding you fast and seeing you smile. This and many other things, by God." Morgan to McQuown, 22 March 1953, McQuown Papers, bx 2, fld 9. It would be inappropriate to recite the pornography that Morgan and McQuown either wrote or exchanged.

Morgan and then herself. When she moved to Las Vegas, she left town without informing him, but Morgan, good detective that he was, tracked her down.¹⁸ It may be impossible at this point to determine the truth of the matter, coincidence or not, but not long after Thomas McQuown accepted a job in San Francisco and moved his family there from Ogden, Utah, Morgan arranged for a job at the Bancroft Library, apparently to be near Madeline. It is worth noting that Morgan's first book, *The Humboldt: Highroad of the West* was dedicated "To Madeline."¹⁹ Morgan seems to have attempted to persuade her to leave her husband throughout their relationship, finally delivering an ultimatum in 1967.²⁰ Madeline, for reasons that are complex if not neurotic, was unable to bring herself to leave Thomas McQuown. She seems to have suffered bouts of depression and even toyed with suicide.²¹ Morgan himself struggled with depression and suicide:

I would give a very great deal to talk to you. But even here there is a kind of paralyzing sense of futility. . . . But what would be more empty than to come up and see you and have you indifferent to my coming, not wanting me to come or embarrassed because I am

¹⁸ See "An interview conducted by Dr. Everett L. Cooley and Della Dye with Gerald Finnin re: Madeline McQuown in Salt Lake City, Utah, on February 24, 1976," McQuown Papers, bx 1, fld 2, p. 18. The pages are not numbered.

¹⁹ Dale L. Morgan, *The Humboldt: Highroad of the West* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1943). Interestingly, Morgan also thanked Thomas McQuown in the acknowledgments.

²⁰ See especially p. 60, "Well, why *not* make your way here? Returning to our subject of yesterday, suppose you name a date when you will leave San Francisco, and I will lay out an itinerary, etc., for you. Put up or shut up, darling!" Also Morgan to McQuown, 9 February 1967, Dale L. Morgan Papers (microfilm of the Bancroft holdings), MS 560, roll 5, frames 799-801, Special Collections Department, University of Utah Library, Salt Lake City. This letter seems to have been written after some kind of confrontation that Morgan described as a "debacle." See also Morgan's despondent letter dated 30 July (no year), Morgan Papers, roll 5, frames 802-5.

²¹ Morgan scolded her, "I want to know that you are feeling better and not monkeying around with carbon monoxide any more, and otherwise living a righteous life . . . and thinking of me once in a while" (p. 71, ellipses in original). Walker's footnote indicates that it is "unclear what Morgan was referring to here" (p. 73), but the practical uses of carbon monoxide are fairly limited.

such a damned fool as not to know when I am not wanted.

As it is, I can do nothing, and I wander around the house disconsolately, hating to be here yet hating more the idea of going anywhere and being alone with myself and without you. I can't even bring myself to go out and walk around the block because I will walk with nothing, and will only be conscious of being with myself—a sort of self-consciousness of which I have a horror. I simply ache with doing nothing and with being able to do nothing. I lie upon the bed as though I were adrift upon an absolute emptiness which I cannot stand, and then I look at a book, and I wonder what I am doing reading other men's books when my own have not been written. . . .

So today I just do nothing and am caught upon a nothingness and life has a more dreary futility than I had ever conceived possible. There doesn't seem to be anything that is worth doing—I think of the jobs I might have, and they mean nothing. Books don't seem worth reading or writing, and my family means nothing to me except a kind of constant irritation. Sometimes I speculate about death and whether I conceivably could commit suicide, but death seems even more futile than life, and it's so damned messy—my family would have to be concerned with stowing me away in a coffin, transfixed by all the personal disgrace or irresponsibility which attaches to a family which believes it could not create a world . . . which this lost member of its family could find worth living in. . . . I do not say that I think seriously of suicide, but I am not talking now simply to startle you. These thoughts go through my mind when I feel no slightest personal warmth in the world.²²

²² Morgan to McQuown, 30 July (no year), 1–4, Morgan Papers, roll 5, frames 802–5. This letter is double spaced, a rarity for Morgan. The double spacing may indicate that it is a draft of a letter that was never sent.

For over twenty years Madeline McQuown had convinced everyone in her inner circle that she was working on a massive and definitive biography of Brigham Young. For most of that time she claimed to be nearly finished. Although Morgan discussed a contract for the book with a Rinehart representative in 1948, and although he talked of the book as being almost finished for most of the twenty years—undoubtedly based on what she had told him²³—McQuown was able to complete no more than five sketchy chapters consisting of little more than 157 pages.²⁴ She was able to use the book, however, to string Morgan along, insisting on his help, but always refusing to provide any portion of the manuscript for him to read or criticize. Meanwhile she complained that the Young biography was ruining her health and used that to explain why the book was not nearing completion and then she used both her health and incomplete book to keep Morgan from seeing the manuscript. Obviously, as time went by, she could not tell Morgan that her manuscript was not complete and for him to actually see the manuscript would force her to admit that in twenty years she had hardly started writing. If she had allowed that to happen, her elaborate deception would have been exposed.²⁵

²³ In 1948 Morgan reported to Brodie that "Madeline and I drove to Evanston Thursday for a close look at Echo Canyon. We would have loved to have you along. She is faced with a serious cutting of her book; it runs to over a thousand pages!" Morgan to Brodie, 22 May 1948, Brodie Papers, bx 7, fld 11, p. 1. I would assume that Morgan obtained the information from McQuown during the trip.

²⁴ The first chapter of McQuown's biography of Brigham Young, *King of the Deseret*, appears to be substantially complete; it consists of twenty-two pages. Drafts of chapters two through five are more or less complete. Chapter six, however, is little more than mere notes. I have attempted to be as generous as possible when counting the pages to McQuown's manuscript; undoubtedly others may count differently. The difficulty of the task is compounded by the existence of two or three drafts of the same chapter and by the insertion of addenda pages in otherwise consecutively numbered chapters. I am tempted to say that, although Morgan never suspected, her efforts at "cutting" her thousand-page manuscript were wildly successful.

²⁵ Morgan seems to have realized all of this. He wrote to McQuown complaining that "you don't, as a matter of fact, attach much importance to working on, or at least finishing, your book. It is, in sober truth, the other way around. It is important to you *not* to finish your book. It always has been important to you *not* to finish your book." Morgan to McQuown, 9 February 1967, p. 2, Morgan Papers, roll 5, frames 799–801. By 21 August 1967, however, when he wrote to

Fortunately, or unfortunately, depending on your point of view, Morgan even talked Fawn Brodie out of writing a biography of Brigham Young because of the book that he was confident that McQuown would complete.²⁶

Dale Morgan's "Sealed Book"

Dale Morgan seems to have had his own sort of "Brigham Young biography," however. For most of his adult life he talked about writing a substantial history of the Church which he hoped would become the definitive work on the subject. In April 1942 Morgan told Juanita Brooks "that I believe I am now capable of writing that definitive history of the Mormons" (p. 26). He indicated that he had "an emotional understanding of Mormonism, and also an intellectual detachment essential to the critical appraisal of it" (p. 26). He was, he said, "spending all my spare hours doing research for the Mormon books" (p. 27).

In 1942, Morgan told S. A. Burgess that he had "read through hundreds of diaries, and . . . had access to scores of official minute books and other documents concerned with the practical working of polygamy as a social system" (p. 40) and went on to explain that he "personally entertain[ed] a large project in

Fawn Brodie, Morgan was back to the story about McQuown's book being "substantially complete" (p. 207). One wonders how he could so easily see through the deception in February, yet be persuaded by it again in August.

²⁶ Morgan wrote Brodie, "Madeline has been working determinedly on her MS despite all physical handicaps the past two years, and from December to July had an apartment in Berkeley to enable her to work at the Bancroft. Her book is now substantially complete, but is so massive a production—it may yet have to be a two volume work—that she has been making a violent effort at compression" (p. 207). Morgan's report to Brodie is illustrative of the sort of tall tale, if one may call it that, that McQuown told Morgan. At the time that Morgan wrote to Brodie, 1967, McQuown had been working on her Brigham Young biography for over twenty years. She certainly dissembled on the question of its status for most of that time. Morgan went on to report that he had "not read any of it, as she has preferred to work independently and show it to me only when prepared to let loose of it, but she has done an amazing research job, and clearly the book will be an event" (p. 207). He then advised Brodie "to wait and see where she comes out at finally, what her standpoint is on Brigham, and what might be left for someone else to say. But this is something that you will have to decide for yourself" (p. 208). The pious may be tempted to see the hand of God in all this.

Mormon history” (p. 41). It was to be a multivolume work, perhaps as many as four or five, usually three, but at least two, and was to be comprehensive; the first volume to cover the period to 1844, the second volume to cover the period until Brigham Young’s death in 1877, and the third volume to bring the story “down to our own time” (p. 159).²⁷ The amount of research necessary to complete the project was massive. Morgan spent most of 1946 and 1947 going through the National Archives, Library of Congress, and the New York Public Library. The last half of 1947 and the first third of 1948 he spent traveling through New England and the Midwest, tracing the path of the early Saints and digging through libraries and archives.

In 1948 Morgan had contracted with Rinehart to produce the volumes. He proposed submitting the volumes “successively on August 1, 1949, August 1, 1950, and August 1, 1951” (p. 160). He then accepted an advance of \$750 to complete the first volume. However, by April 7, 1949, he was forced to admit that the writing was proceeding slowly. He said, “I seem to work all the time without ever having much to show for the time put in” (p. 168). Some of this extra time was spent attempting to find rare or obscure publications, most of them housed in the Church archives. Although the Church archives had refused him access to its materials—Morgan seemingly thought the archives were a research library, while the Historian’s Office thought they were a private library (p. 154)—he continued to attempt to retrieve materials through the back door, as it were, under the auspices of the Utah State Historical Society (p. 172). Morgan had admitted that he had not “always been quite ethical in drawing upon the Historian’s Office for stuff” (p. 30), and, given his review in 1945 of Fawn Brodie’s infamous *No Man Knows My History*, it is not surprising that the Historian’s Office would deny him access.²⁸

By 8 September 1949, Morgan again admitted to Brodie that his “book [was] coming along slowly” (p. 174). Although he was well past the deadline, he seemed to enjoy promoting his books to whomever would listen. On 18 December 1950, he wrote to McQuown to tell a story of how Israel Smith (then President of the

²⁷ Morgan to Brodie, 28 January 1946, p. 2 bx 7, fld 7, Brodie Papers.

²⁸ Dale L. Morgan, “A Prophet and His Legend,” *Saturday Review of Literature*, 24 November 1945, 7–8.

Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints) and Francis Kirkham had dropped by his apartment to discuss his research. Morgan reported that Smith was “extremely interested in my book” (p. 179); he had a flair for explaining the great things his book would accomplish and always had a mastery of every historical detail, however obscure.²⁹

Sometime in early January 1952, with the book some two and a half years overdue, Stanley Rinehart decided to cancel Morgan’s contract. To Morgan it seemed that the letter was “so nasty in its tone that I bridled all over” (p. 193). Rinehart pointed out that Morgan had been working on his book for seventeen years.

We have now received three chapters, so preliminary in nature that they give no indication of the projected book, and the volume of correspondence far outweighs this amount of manuscript. It seems to us grossly unfair for you to draw an advance and agree to a production schedule which called for the first volume two and a half years ago, and then make so little apparent effort to fulfill your commitment. (p. 193)

Rinehart offered to allow Morgan to complete the book or return the advance. Morgan complained bitterly, “neither for \$750 or any other sum do I give any man the right to insult or condescend to me” (p. 193). Morgan decided to contract with Bobbs-Merrill for a biography of Jedediah Smith, for which he received a \$750 advance, and refunded that amount to Rinehart for the release of his contract. In that way “the Mormon book need go to the printer only when I am satisfied with it finally,”

²⁹ Morgan told Fawn Brodie essentially the same story the next day. See Morgan to Brodie, 19 December 1950, Brodie Papers, bx 7, fld 12, p. 1. One of the interesting things about *On Early Mormonism* is that, when faced with a choice between letters which relate essentially the same information, Walker almost always chooses the more dull letter to Madeline Reeder McQuown rather than a similar letter to Brodie. The reason may be that the letters published in the book are found in the McQuown Papers. I have not bothered to check. Nevertheless the reader does not have the opportunity to enjoy Morgan’s ironic sense of humor. For example, “My sister seems to go on the principle that what is good enough for you [Brodie] is good enough for her, for she has a baby girl born December 3. So what’s it going to be next time around, Fawn, a little Joseph Smith Brodie or an Emma Smith Brodie?” Ibid.

Morgan wrote (p. 194). *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West*,³⁰ all 468 pages of it, was published a year later in 1953.

Although Morgan was without a contract for his *magnum opus*, the work for which he was surely to be remembered, he continued to talk about completing it for the rest of his life. He wrote to Brodie in 1955, explaining that he would get back to his Mormon book once he finished his book of Jedediah Smith maps (pp. 201–2). He mentioned it again in 1957 (p. 204), 1967 (p. 207) and 1970 (p. 211).³¹ During his entire life, and even in the nineteen years between the termination of his contract with Rinehart and his death in 1971,³² there was scarcely a person he talked to about Mormon things whom he did not impress with his vast store of detail and with tall tales of his forthcoming definitive history of Mormonism.

The completed four chapters and appendix of Morgan's book, housed in the Madeline Reeder McQuown collection, consist of one hundred and twenty double-spaced pages. Some of these chapters contain Morgan's handwritten changes and corrections. The three draft chapters from Morgan's papers, housed at

³⁰ Dale L. Morgan, *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the American West* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953).

³¹ Mention of his "Mormon book" in *On Early Mormonism* is not representative of the amount of correspondence in which he in some way talked about the book. Note also Morgan's confident statement, "I think my book completely polishes off the First Vision," letter fragment, Madeline Reeder McQuown Papers, bx 2, fld 17; "I finally realized that all my time here would have to be spent on my book," letter fragment, McQuown Papers, bx 2, fld 13; "as Rinehart's letter arrived in the midst of it, you can imagine how well received were his easy remarks about the time I require to write the kind of book I want mine to be," letter fragment, McQuown Papers, bx 2, fld 17; "my demonstration that the revivals which figure in Mormon history took place in 1824–25, five years after the supposed First Vision, and a year or more after the Angel Moroni looked in on Joseph is conclusive, I think, and will probably be regarded as the most important single contribution of my book," letter fragment (1947?), McQuown Papers, bx 2, fld 15; "I once thought of writing in four or five volumes, and I don't say I won't yet, but practical considerations may have a compressive effect," Morgan to Brodie, 28 January 1946, Brodie Papers, bx 7, fld 7, p. 2.

³² For those who are counting, that makes some thirty-six years he talked about his great work. I am unwilling to count pages, but Morgan wrote or edited no less than twenty books comprising thousands of pages in the nineteen years after 1952.

the Bancroft and printed in the book, required extensive editing and some editorial decisions (p. 217). The book ends abruptly with the chapter on the Book of Mormon. It is as though Morgan was only able to work through his version of the history of the crucial foundation events. Morgan had thought that when he finished "the absolutely controversial chapters which set Joseph up in business as a prophet" the book would begin to flow.³³ One of the more striking characteristics of Morgan's book, when compared to Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History*, is that his does not "flow."

Dale Morgan, Fawn Brodie, and *No Man Knows My History*

Dale Morgan met Fawn Brodie in 1943 when they both lived in Washington, D.C.³⁴ By this time Brodie had been researching what would become *No Man Knows My History* for some five years.³⁵ Whatever the details of their first meeting, Morgan became intensely interested in Brodie's project. From 1943 to 1947 they exchanged a flurry of letters, first identifying and interpreting documents and then, after the publication of *No Man Knows My History*, discussing the reaction to the book, including Brodie's excommunication.³⁶

³³ Letter fragment to Madeline Reeder McQuown (1947?), McQuown Papers, bx 2, fld 15. The entire paragraph is worth quoting: "I have been working hard on my book and feel better about it. When a book begins to flow, there is no feeling quite like it, just as there is no feeling quite so disintegrative when a book will not move, or when the writing is no good. I am now moving past the most difficult parts, the absolutely controversial chapters which set Joseph up in business as a prophet, and as the Mormon and non-Mormon view of him become more congruent and unite as a narrative, things will go faster. Although it will be a hard ten weeks work, it is not unreasonable to think I will have the book done by April. What I would then like is to put it on ice for a few months and then polish it in cold blood, but I will have to manage as I can within the framework of my obligations."

³⁴ Newell G. Bringhurst, "Juanita Brooks and Fawn Brodie—Sisters in Dissent," *Dialogue* 27/2 (Summer 1994): 111.

³⁵ Shirley E. Stephenson, "Fawn McKay Brodie: An Oral History Interview," *Dialogue* 14/2 (Summer 1981): 107.

³⁶ Morgan reacted to Brodie's excommunication by writing the following: "A thing like that is a rude shock, there's no two ways about it. If one could

Some of the help Morgan provided Brodie took the form of providing sources. He told her of Wilhelm Wyl's tale of Porter Rockwell attempting to murder Lilburn Boggs, which, like many of the things he provided, showed up in her book (p. 53).³⁷ (Brodie noted that "it is possible, of course, that Bennett's and Jackson's accusations were pure fabrication,"³⁸ but not until after she had told the story with all its lurid detail.) He also pointed her toward genealogical information about the Smith family, Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* (with which they were apparently familiar through B. H. Roberts's "Parallel"), various sensational stories about the feared and dangerous Danites, and the secret Council of Fifty. Morgan also helped her sort out various details about Joseph's wives.³⁹ Few portions of *No Man Knows My History* went without help or comment from Morgan. He was especially useful in matters of detail and sources.

The greatest help Morgan may have provided, however, came in the form of comments on Brodie's manuscript. In August 1944 he indicated that he had "done practically nothing in [his] spare time but read [Brodie's] manuscript" (p. 67). He described it as

resign from the church, you and I would have resigned ten years ago. But one cannot resign, one can only be excommunicated, and I would guess that as in my own case, you did not demand excommunication because there was no point to causing needless pain to numerous relatives" (p. 126). Morgan went on to explain, or perhaps wish, that his own book might get him thrown out of the Church. "Anyhow, by that time I may be in your company, though it is true I don't have any vindictive avuncular church authorities in the undergrowth of my life" (p. 126). Exactly who the "vindictive" relatives were that had Brodie excommunicated is unclear and is probably just hyperbole on Morgan's part. She reported that two missionaries delivered the letter inviting her to a bishop's court, thus making it appear to be a local matter. She did not elect to attend the "court," instead sending a letter explaining that she "was a heretic." Stephenson, "Brodie: An Oral History Interview," 102. Newell Bringhurst, "Juanita Brooks and Fawn Brodie," 120, indicates that William H. Reeder, then president of the Eastern States Mission, supervised Brodie's excommunication. It is not clear that Reeder is related to the McKay family, although he was Madeline Reeder McQuown's uncle.

³⁷ Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 330.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 331.

³⁹ Morgan to Brodie, 16 February 1944, Brodie Papers, bx 7, fld 3; Morgan to Brodie, 12 February 1944, Brodie Papers, bx 7, fld 3; Morgan to Brodie, 14 January 1943, Brodie Papers, bx 7, fld 2; Morgan to Brodie, 3 August 1944, Brodie Papers, bx 7, fld 4.

"thoroughly engrossing" and was unable to put it down until "2 A.M." (p. 67). "The research," he said, "is wide and deep without being ostentatious, the prose is clean and on the whole admirably muscular" (p. 67). If he heaped uncritical praise on the book, he also noted that the "only really grave defect in the first 25 chapters [!] is the handling of the Nauvoo material" (p. 67). He went on to warn her of "the amount of space you give to polygamy" (p. 68) and indicated that she had "not hesitated to come to bold judgments on the basis of assumptions" (p. 69). While he thought they sometimes "come off astonishingly," he also warned that sometimes "they leave you [Brodie] out on limbs" (p. 69). "The point is," he said, "by their very boldness, these generalizations expose you to attack as you are exposed in no other way" (p. 69) "And nowhere will you be more vulnerable . . . than in the area of generalizations. Because your generalizations about Smith's character and related matters are of key importance to your book" (p. 69). He indicated that he had not performed a minute study of her sources and hence "cannot say where your [Brodie's] generalizations are abundantly supported in fact and where they represent, to a degree, your own intuitions" (p. 69). He concluded by warning Brodie that "it is highly important that you should not talk like God on insubstantial foundations" (p. 70).

When *No Man Knows My History* was finally published just over a year later, Morgan was among the first to review it.⁴⁰ He then embarked upon a long campaign of responding to the various criticisms of the book. By far the longest letter reproduced in *On Early Mormonism*—running ten pages—is Morgan's reply to Bernard DeVoto's review (pp. 106–15).⁴¹ Writing to Brodie and telling her of his exchange with DeVoto, Morgan said "the tone of my letter was on the tactless side" (p. 116).⁴² Morgan could

⁴⁰ Morgan, "A Prophet and His Legend," 7–8.

⁴¹ This is one of the few places in the book in which things begin to be garbled. The letter itself has the date of 2 January 1946; *On Early Mormonism* has only "January 1946." The heading on the following pages incorrectly assigns the letter "To Fawn Brodie—1945" until the very last page of the letter. See also Morgan's initial reaction to DeVoto's review, 92–101.

⁴² Again, *On Early Mormonism* has the date of this letter as "January 1946." The letter itself, however, has the date as 7 January 1946.

hardly tolerate criticism of *No Man Knows My History* and even found himself responding vigorously to Juanita Brooks's mild criticisms (pp. 119–24).⁴³

When Hugh Nibley published "No Ma'am, That's Not History," Morgan described it as "something of a slapstick performance" (p. 125). Neither Brodie nor Morgan knew who Nibley was and Morgan speculated, incorrectly, that he must be Preston

43 Newell Bringhurst notes that Brooks wrote to Hugh Nibley to defend *No Man Knows My History* after she had read "No Ma'am, That's Not History." After reporting that Brooks claimed that "we have been entirely too hysterical about [*No Man Knows*]," Bringhurst, "Juanita Brooks and Fawn Brodie," 118, indicates that Brooks "pointed out a number of errors and misstatements made by Nibley." Bringhurst does not indicate the degree to which Brooks was eager to defend Brodie. According to Brooks, "her book is good for the church and good for us all, if only to stimulate further study." Juanita Brooks to Hugh Nibley, 7 November 1946, Juanita Brooks Collection, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, bx 1, fld 13, p. 1. Brooks's specific criticisms of Nibley are, to say the least, a little farfetched. She complained, "has there never really been a Mormon scholar? To me that would be a reflection on our church." Nibley had reference to people like Augustine, who spent his entire life attempting to assimilate the Gospel as he knew it to Neoplatonism. Brooks also commented on Nibley's line that "'there has never been a council or synod to alter or *even discuss* any matter of doctrine.' Seems to me that our doctrine might well be discussed with profit, and I thought that the Quorum of Twelve did not shun it." Nibley was referring to the great councils (for example, of Nicaea), in which the greatest scholars of the age attempt to make sense out of confusing apostate doctrines like the Trinity. The Saints have never had need for any such thing. To have the Quorum of the Twelve discuss issues hardly constitutes a council or synod. Finally, Brooks complained about Nibley's statement that "the gospel as the Mormons know it sprang full grown from the words of Joseph Smith. It has never been worked over or touched up in any way, and is free of revisions and alterations." She had three items in which she thought the gospel had been changed: the law of consecration, polygamy, and the United Order. However one chooses to think of such things, they are still discussed and, at least in the case of the law of consecration and the United Order, the Saints still look forward to the day in which it will again be implemented, or they simply live them as best they can right now. In any case, all of these items are or can be profitably talked about in priesthood meeting, for example. These were Brooks's best examples; the other few are not as good. Her best arguments hardly constitute a criticism of the core of Nibley's stance. For all the defensiveness about Fawn Brodie, and despite those who attempt to portray Brooks as a wonderful symbol of dissent, Brooks was unable to touch Nibley, who seems to have ignored her.

Nibley's son.⁴⁴ He complained to Brodie that "Nibley is much more intoxicated with his own language than you, the 'glib English major,' are" (p. 125).⁴⁵ He went on to explain that the "interesting thing is that both Nibley and [Albert E.] Bowen actually leave severely alone the structure of your book. Their quarrel," he continued, "is with words alone" (p. 126). "Actually, you are being challenged on very few fundamental grounds. Change, say, 20 phrases in your book and you have eliminated nine-tenths of their criticisms without in any way impairing the factual structure of the biography" (p. 126). Nibley's critique, however, was far more fundamental than merely twenty phrases, and no cosmetic change to *No Man Knows My History* could fix the flaws he identified. Morgan was unable, or perhaps unwilling, to see the similarity between Nibley's criticism of Brodie and his own warnings a year before. The similarities are striking:

Morgan:

I believe that the greatest part of your trouble is that . . . the amount of space you give to polygamy sets up strains of disproportion. . . . You do not have a sufficient skeleton to support the body of your narrative. (pp. 67-68)

Nibley:

Brodie's Joseph, rioting with his fifty wives, is not the man whose conceptions of marriage so completely escape her. Emma Smith and Eliza Snow were not acquainted with the oversexed rake that Mrs. Brodie knows so well.⁴⁶

Morgan:

One of the weaknesses of your book [is] that you have not hesitated to come to bold judgments on the basis of

⁴⁴ Morgan to Brodie, 15 May 1946. Brodie Papers, bx 7, fld, 7, p. 1. Morgan also guessed, incorrectly, that "Preston [was] at least a silent partner in the assault upon your book."

⁴⁵ I have excised the editor's explanatory comment. "(a professor at LDS church-owned Brigham Young University)."

⁴⁶ Nibley, "No, Ma'am, That's Not History," 37.

assumptions . . . [which] sometimes . . . leave you out on limbs. (p. 69)

Nibley:

At the end of the book in which she has leaned so heavily on the categorical “must have,” our author displays an equal virtuosity with the categorical “would have.” She tells us without a moment’s hesitation just what would have happened if the Prophet had not been killed. . . . This is history in the Brodie tradition. The young woman who can tell us with perfect confidence just what *must* have happened and what *would* have happened is not one to be stopped by uncooperative documents and recalcitrant sources; and she is most at home when there are no documents at all.⁴⁷

Morgan:

Your book, with respect to these chapters, rests pretty heavily on the authority of Howe.⁴⁸

Your chain of reasoning looks logical, but it is attended by a string of *ifs* all along the line . . . and the probability of error increases as the chain of reasoning lengthens.⁴⁹

Nibley:

Must it always be “would have” and “must have” and fourth-dimensional psychology and [Howe’s] “Mor-

⁴⁷ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁸ Morgan has reference to Eber D. Howe’s *Mormonism Unveiled: or, A Faithful Account of That Singular Imposition and Delusion, from Its Rise to the Present Time. With Sketches of the Characters of Its Propagators, and a Full Detail of the Manner in Which the Golden Bible Was Brought before the World. To Which Are Added, Inquiries into the Probability That the Historical Part of the Said Bible Was Written by One Solomon Spalding, More Than Twenty Years Ago, and By Him Intended to Have Been Published as a Romance* (Painesville, OH: privately printed, 1834).

⁴⁹ Undated letter titled, “Memo from Dale Morgan,” in Brodie’s handwriting. Brodie Papers, bx 7, fld 1, pp. 1–2.

monism Unveiled” and reading between the lines of vindictive but ambiguous newspaper articles?⁵⁰

Morgan:

And nowhere will you be more vulnerable, in the light of such fault finding, than in the area of generalizations. . . . I cannot say where your generalizations are abundantly supported in fact and where they represent, to a degree, your own intuitions. (p. 69)

Nibley:

The Brodie evolutionary theory rests heavily on the word “now.” If it is written, “he now refused to beat his wife,” or “he now ate eggs for breakfast,” one naturally assumes that the subject formerly did beat his wife in the one case, and in the other, that he formerly did *not* eat eggs for breakfast. That is what the words insinuate, but it is not what they say: actually the man may never have beaten his wife and always had eggs for breakfast. Mrs. Brodie introduces every selected key event in the life of Joseph Smith with a “now” of this sort, making it appear in each case that the thing was occurring for the first time; for this she has no proof, of course, but the little “now” enables her to build up his career step by step the way she wants it.⁵¹

Morgan:

But it is highly important that you should not talk like God on insubstantial foundations. (p. 70)

Nibley:

When Joseph faced Emma for the last time “he knew she knew that she thought him a coward.” So Brodie knows that Emma knew that Joseph knew what Emma thought! Is this *history*? There might be some merit in this sort of thing if, like the invented speeches of the Greek historian, it took some skill to produce.

⁵⁰ Nibley, “No, Ma’am, That’s Not History,” 38.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

But, if anything, it is hard for the historian to avoid the pitfalls of such cheap and easy psychology.⁵²

Morgan liked to think that he did not "quarrel, as a rule, anyhow, except with extremely disagreeable people, and only with them when I have to" (p. 116). He was, however, touchy when it came to criticism of *No Man Knows My History*. Morgan routinely and vigorously challenged anyone who presumed to disagree, especially in any fundamental way, with Fawn Brodie's book.

Dale Morgan on "The Great Divide"

When Marvin S. Hill reviewed the second edition of *No Man Knows My History*, with its extended "Supplement," in 1974, he claimed that

the mature Brodie seems to be telling us that her old interpretation was too simple. Perhaps what Brodie may have recognized at last is that her original interpretation perceived Joseph Smith in falacious [sic] terms, as either prophet in the traditional Mormon sense or else as faker. Her original thesis opens considerable room for speculation because its either-or alternatives were precisely the same as those of . . . Orson Pratt. . . . But between Pratt and Brodie a hundred years of Mormon experience have intervened. Whereas Pratt affirmed that with Smith's accomplishments he must have been a true prophet, Brodie, looking at the man's limitations, concluded he was a fraud. Possibly now historians should begin to explore the broad, promising middle ground which neither Pratt nor Brodie fully perceived.⁵³

⁵² Ibid., 34.

⁵³ Marvin S. Hill, "Secular or Sectarian History? A Critique of *No Man Knows My History*," *Church History* 43/1 (March 1974): 96. Commenting in 1988 on his "broad, promising middle ground," Hill identified a "faith-promoting history" "on the right," "professionals" in the center, and those who insist that Joseph Smith was involved in fraud on the left. See Marvin S. Hill, "The 'New Mormon History' Reassessed in Light of Recent Books on Joseph Smith and Mormon Origins," *Dialogue* 21/3 (Autumn 1988): 115. It is clear, however,

Hill seems to have been looking for a middle ground somewhere between prophet and fraud. Hill therefore seems to be suggesting that it is possible to craft explanations of Joseph Smith that avoid the difficulties of the prophet-fraud dichotomy. These explanations would be superior to those offered by Orson Pratt, on the one hand, and Brodie on the other, to the degree that they were successful in avoiding "either-or alternatives." At the time Hill was unaware that Brodie, Morgan, and Juanita Brooks had carefully discussed these issues.

When Juanita Brooks wrote to Morgan to explain her reaction to Brodie's *No Man Knows My History*, Morgan wrote back to defend and explain his and Brodie's "point of view upon religious topics" (p. 86). Morgan explained that he thought "Fawn began her book with the zealot's gleam in her eye, to present 'the truth' and overwhelm any unhappy Mormon who might chance to read her disquisition" (p. 86). She matured, he said, as she went along and could finally "see it in proper perspective" (p. 86). The difference between Brooks and Morgan, he explained, "all boils down to that old philosophical conundrum, 'What is Truth?' There is no absolute or final definition of truth. It has emotional values for some people, intellectual values for others" (p. 86). He then described how their "points of view upon Mormonism and all religion are rooted in our fundamental viewpoint on God" (p. 86). Brooks had experiences that led her to believe Joseph Smith's story.⁵⁴ Morgan's "attitude," which he thought he

from his 1974 language, that at that time Hill was describing a middle ground between prophet and not-prophet. Thus Hill could fault Brodie for ignoring "other possibilities; for example, that the witnesses saw the plates as a result of their own psychological and religious needs." "Secular or Sectarian History," 92. (Hill does not indicate that one of the possibilities Brodie "ignores" is that they actually saw the plates, exactly as they reported.) In 1974, at least, it is clear that Hill thought that a middle ground between prophet and not-prophet was possible, if not desirable, by appealing to social science categories and explanations borrowed from religious studies. In fairness to Hill, however, he did not have access to Brodie's papers, which indicate that she had thought such issues through carefully and rejected the possibility of a middle ground between prophet and not-prophet.

⁵⁴ At times Newell Bringhurst hints at Brooks's faith, but her story is more detailed and interesting than he lets on; see his "Juanita Brooks and Fawn Brodie," 115. Brooks indicated that "there are those who do not believe in visions or supernatural manifestations, hence decide that Joseph could not have

shared with Brodie, was that he felt "absolutely no necessity to postulate the existence of God as explanation of anything whatever. To me," Morgan continued, "God exists only as a force in human conduct consequent upon the hypothecation of such a being by man" (p. 87). He described the notion of God as a "quirk in men's minds" and described his own views as "essentially . . . atheist" (p. 87).

Morgan then explained his own claim to "objectivity." "I put together the facts that I can find, . . . and thus slowly and painfully I build toward central conceptions." He was, however, aware of the "fatal defect" in his "objectivity. It is," he said,

had any. A few experiences which I have had personally make me slow to try to judge whether a person has really had an experience with spiritual significance." Her husband, Ernest Pulsipher, was "desperately ill, suffering beyond imagination. We lived," she said, "up on 9th avenue, not far from the L.D.S. hospital. . . . Across a deep gully to the west was the State Capitol Building. How was it that one night, when I felt that I MUST have help, that unless I did have it—well, anyway there was a knock, and when I answered the door a man asked, 'Is there any trouble in this house?' I could not answer; I could only point to the man on the bed. Without preliminaries, I got the oil, he administered to Ern and as he did, Ernest fell asleep. Afterwards he visited a while with me. . . . But he told me a story as incredible as any I have ever heard. . . . He told me that he lived in the southern part of town, that he had been impressed to go uptown, that he had come to the center of town, had transferred to a 9th ave. car, had got off at our stop, walked up past the other four or five doors to our place. He was a recent convert to the church. . . . Anyway I went to bed that night, the first in many, and slept until the sun wakened me in the morning, because Ernest slept, too. . . . Yes, I can hardly believe it myself. Yet at the time it was real. I wrote home about it. I made a note of it in a little record book." Juanita Brooks to Dale Morgan, 9 December 1940, Brooks Collection, bx 1, fld 10, pp. 2–3. Brodie, unsurprisingly, felt the need to explain this experience away. Morgan, on the other hand, was "willing to admit a dozen explanations of this, including pure chance" (p. 118). I expect that many Saints can relate similar experiences. I do not know if Morgan or Brodie ever knew of Brooks's near-death experience. She described leaving her body and seeing herself lying on the bed. She was then transported to her father's home in Bunkerville and saw and heard her family going about their business in the kitchen. "Francis came just after I had come to and turned over. I told him all about it right then. That was Friday night, and on Sunday we went home to visit, and I told my folks, and every word of their conversation was real, even to the slang word mother used when the cinders fell in the mush, the churning, the horse in the manger, the smoking lamp, and all." Juanita Brooks to "Brother and Sister Esplin," 11 September 1939, Brooks Collection, Box 1, fld 4, p. 2.

an objectivity on one side only of a philosophical Great Divide. With my point of view on God, I am incapable of accepting the claims of Joseph Smith and the Mormons, be they however so convincing. If God does not exist, how can Joseph Smith's story have any possible validity? I will look everywhere for explanations except to the ONE explanation that is the position of the Church" (p. 87).

Brooks, he explained, was on the other side of that Great Divide, largely accepting the claims of Joseph Smith.

Unsurprisingly, the question of whether "Joseph was indeed a conscious fraud and impostor," that is, prophet or not-prophet, was precisely what Morgan described as "the point of departure" between himself and Brooks—the Great Divide (p. 88). Morgan explained that Brodie "has clarified my thinking in this connection." Earlier he was "half disposed to accept a median point of view where Mormon and non-Mormon may almost meet" (p. 89). This is Hill's middle ground. In such a view, Morgan held that "The Mormon may consent to the idea that the plates were only apparently real, that Joseph gained access to them through a series of visions, as a concession from the original Mormon contention that the plates could be felt and hefted. And the non-Mormon may conceive of Joseph as a victim of delusions, a dreamy mystic, so to speak" (p. 89).

Brodie had made Morgan aware, however, of the fundamental flaw with this "middle-ground" explanation. "But when you get at the hard core of the situation," he later told Brooks, "the Book of Mormon as an objective fact, there isn't any middle ground; it becomes as simple a matter as the Mormon[s] and anti-Mormons originally said it was" (p. 89). The bottom line was "either Joseph was all he claimed to be, or during the period at least of the writing of the Book of Mormon he was a 'conscious fraud and impostor'" (p. 89).

Some forty years later Lawrence Foster offered "suggestions" that he thought "could contribute to the development of a comprehensive naturalistic explanation of the Book of Mormon—an explanation which could go beyond the conventional Mormon view that it is a literal history translated by Joseph Smith or the

conventional anti-Mormon view that it is a conscious fraud."⁵⁵ Foster's explanation was to span the Great Divide; his would be a genuine middle-ground explanation. "The greatest single weakness of most previous interpretations of the Book of Mormon," according to Foster, "has been their failure to take into account comparative perspectives on revelatory and trance phenomena."⁵⁶ He thought "the Book of Mormon is probably best understood, at least in part, as a trance-related production." He claimed, "the fact that Smith could work for hours on end, suggests that Smith was acting as an unusually gifted trance figure."⁵⁷ Foster then opined that "available evidence . . . is thus most nearly compatible with the idea that the Book of Mormon should properly be viewed . . . as 'inspiration' or 'revelation' rather than as a literal translation or history in any sense."⁵⁸ Thus the traditional understanding of the Book of Mormon that is central to the faith, memory, and community of the Saints is trans-

⁵⁵ Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons and the Oneida Community* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 294.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 295. Morgan had already begun to explore and reject the possibilities of "trance phenomena" in 1945. He explained to Bernard DeVoto that "No visions or hallucinations in themselves can explain the physical text of the Book of Mormon. I was at one time half inclined to the belief that Joseph might have been a borderline personality, subject indeed to hallucinations, and that he may as he supposed have seen the Golden Plates with the eye of faith (call it delusion), dictating the book from something like a trance state. This idea has the advantage of leaving Joseph's sincerity unimpaired, and makes less troublesome the analysis of his subsequent career. . . . One hard fact alone seems to me to require us to come to grips with a decision that Joseph either was all he said he was, a prophet of the living God translating from plates of gold, or a conscious fraud and impostor. This is the matter contained in the Book of Mormon and constituting what is called the Isaiah problem. I cannot find it logical that Joseph committed these thousands of words from Isaiah to memory. I find it a good deal more reasonable to conjecture that he had an opened Bible with him on the other side of the curtain" (p. 96). Foster clearly likes the idea of leaving Joseph's sincerity intact. Morgan, on the other hand, would ignore the testimony that eyewitnesses to the production of the Book of Mormon, after the loss of the 116 pages, report nothing—let alone a curtain or blanket—between Joseph and his scribe. See Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991), 55 and especially 173.

⁵⁷ Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 296.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 297.

formed if not jettisoned. "From a Mormon perspective," Foster admonished (in language remarkably similar to Morgan's), "the book could then be described as 'divinely inspired' [Morgan's 'dreamy mystic']; from a non-Mormon view-point, it could be seen as an unusually sophisticated product of unconscious and little-known mental processes" which were Morgan's "only apparently real" plates.⁵⁹ Foster's explanation, however, does not begin to address the problems that Morgan saw in such middle-ground explanations. The Book of Mormon, by its very existence (Morgan's "Book of Mormon as an objective fact") demands to be taken seriously as ancient history. Foster's explanation demands that the Saints abandon the very claims that separate and distinguish them from others and that provide their own unique identity.

Dale Morgan on "Objective" History

Dale Morgan was very much a child of his times when it came to the question of whether objective history is a possible or desirable thing. He talked about objectivity with innocence and never, as far as the texts he left behind indicate, questioned in any fundamental way the possibility of objectivity.

After explaining to Juanita Brooks that he had not "always been quite ethical in drawing upon the [LDS Church] Historian's Office," he went on to justify that by explaining that he would "make only the most ethical use of the material" he had gathered to date (p. 30). He continued his rationalization, saying that he would only use that material "within the canons of the highest historical objectivity" and indicated that his conscience did not bother him (p. 30). Objectivity, in this sense, appears to mean that Morgan would not sensationalize what he had found.

Not long after he wrote these words, Morgan wrote to S. A. Burgess, an RLDS historian who had written him about an earlier publication, the *Utah Guide*. In this case he used objectivity as a slogan with which to soften or rebut criticisms from Burgess. He explained that he had attempted to "draw a picture of Mormon beliefs from an objective point of view" (p. 35). Presumably no one would be foolish enough to want to argue with an

⁵⁹ Ibid.

“objective” interpretation. Morgan went on to say that he thought “that any reasoned consideration of these pages will confirm the honesty and objectivity of our observation . . . of the Utah scene” (p. 35). The insistence on honesty, reason, and objectivity was, of course, meant to silence criticism, not to imply any special rigor. Morgan larded the letter with talk of “any objective critic” (p. 36), insisted that Brigham Young biographer M. R. Werner “had no propagandic purpose to serve” (p. 37), talked about “the abstract truth of the matter” (p. 38), and then went on to insist on the “honest picture” of Joseph “as a man” and on “the integrity of our intention and the objectivity of our interpretation” (p. 40). How could anyone disagree with such a wonderfully reasonable explanation?

In moments of reflection Morgan could see that his own “naturalistic” point of view—that is, “disbelieving in the concept of God,” which hence made him “‘objective’ and ‘unbiased’”—would appear to the believer to be biased (p. 43). But even after granting that his “agnosticism” or “atheism” denied the fundamental grounds of faith, he still claimed that his “interpretation of Mormon history will not . . . do such violence to Mormon ideas of that history” (p. 43). He went on in the same letter to boast of his “intellectual detachment” and “scientific attitude” (p. 44), which presumably equipped him to deal objectively with Mormon history. He was naive enough to claim that, “if you gather enough facts, and organize them properly, they provide their own conclusions” (p. 45). He did not see that the theories which identified a “fact” for him and which he used to “organize them properly” were his own constructs and hence shared his own biases, hopes, and assumptions.

When defending *No Man Knows My History*, Morgan often talked about such things as “intellectual objectivity” (p. 86) or “objective facts” (p. 87). He explained to Juanita Brooks that his motivation in writing Mormon history was to “try to tread objectively between warring points of view, to get at facts, uncover them for facts, and see what the facts have to say to a reasonable intelligence” (p. 121). Throughout his life Morgan used adjectives like “scholarly,” “absolute,” and “scientific” to describe objectivity. He most often used the word *objectivity* when engaged in a polemic, and then usually to silence criticism. Morgan was, as he

would say of Joseph Smith, "perfectly the expression of the zeitgeist" (p. 68).⁶⁰

Dale Morgan on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon

"From the naturalistic point of view that is mine and Fawn's and yours," Morgan wrote to Bernard DeVoto, "it is not to be expected that the Book of Mormon should be regarded as the product of a matured intelligence with something to say" (p. 93). Before Morgan actually began writing his book on "The Mormons," he had already framed his views of Joseph Smith and the foundation events of the Church in dialogues with Fawn Brodie, Juanita Brooks, Bernard DeVoto, and Madeline Reeder McQuown. His assumption that the Book of Mormon was not a product of "a matured intelligence," whatever else it may mean, clearly colored the way in which Morgan understood the Book of Mormon. The central question for Morgan was whether Joseph Smith was "a conscious fraud and impostor" (p. 96). Once this question was decided, how one chose to tell Joseph's story of the visions and plates, or even describe the contents of the Book of Mormon, was more or less decided. Morgan thought that Brodie's "half-remembered dream" explanation of the First Vision was especially reasonable. "I have myself had dreams which persisted as waking memories," he told DeVoto, "and then faded into a generalized memory in which, after a lapse of time, for all my critical apparatus and detachment, I have found almost impossible to distinguish details actually remembered and dream details inextricably intermingled" (p. 97).⁶¹ Morgan's own explanation of Joseph Smith and early Mormonism followed Fawn Brodie's

⁶⁰ Peter Novick does a nice job outlining the received opinions on objectivity and the arguments of those who attempted to criticize those opinions during the 1940s and 1950s. See Novick, *That Noble Dream*, 250–78.

⁶¹ "The awesome vision he described in later years was probably the elaboration of some half-remembered dream, stimulated by the early revival excitement and reinforced by the rich folklore of visions circulating in his neighborhood. Or it may have been sheer invention, created some time after 1830." Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 25. The 1830 date was forced on Brodie by the 1832 version of the First Vision. She had originally thought the date was 1838.

explanation closely, except when he disagreed with her—then it was usually more radical.

Always conscious of the naturalistic assumptions which controlled his explanatory framework—and that entailed “disbelief in the concept of God”—Morgan crafted his explanation to take into account Joseph’s family as well as the larger environment. He began his tale by explaining how “imagination and ambition were never beaten out of [Joseph, Sr.] but these were qualities which did not make any more endurable the drudgery of the farm” (p. 220). Morgan found it necessary to invent an unhappy Joseph Sr. who detested his life on the farm and who escaped in “fantasy” and dreams.⁶² These qualities he instilled in his son, Joseph. Morgan goes on to explain the “milieu”—the larger culture outside of the immediate influence of his family—in which Joseph found himself. Mound-builders figure prominently in this explanation, like they do in Fawn Brodie’s, as do attempts to explain the American Indians as “descendants of the ten tribes of Israel” (p. 227).⁶³ “The social environment was favorable,” Morgan said, “the whole climate of opinion and belief in which so much more was possible of growth in another time and place” (p. 229).⁶⁴ Joseph’s environment worked on him to produce the Book of Mormon and later the Church.

⁶² Richard Bushman, in what is undoubtedly the best book on Joseph Smith, does not resort to novelists’ speculation when discussing Joseph or his father. Morgan, Brodie, and their inner circle thought that for a history to read really well some of the novelist’s art must be brought to the task. Bushman’s effort is better written, and hence more coherent, without the added literary embellishments and speculation. See Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1984): 29–42.

⁶³ The word *mound* occurs at least six times on pages 227 and 228. It does not, however, occur in the Book of Mormon at all—an interesting omission, since explaining the mysterious mound-builders was supposedly one of the reasons Joseph fabricated the Book of Mormon. A phrase like “their dead bodies were heaped up upon the face of the earth” occurs only three times in the 588 pages of the first edition of the Book of Mormon. How could Joseph have been so negligent? According to Brodie, “the plan of Joseph’s book was to come directly out of popular theory concerning the Moundbuilders.” *No Man Knows My History*, 36.

⁶⁴ This is not a mistake. It is just slightly less than coherent.

Remarkably, or unremarkably, depending on your point of view, Morgan provided what he thought was Joseph Smith's "exact analogue" (p. 230), a youngster named William Titt. Drawing from the journal of Utah pioneer Priddy Meeks, Morgan explained that Titt was "born a natural seer" (p. 230). William Titt could find lost property with his seerstone, but even in the best case this is where the "exact analogue" to Joseph ends. Titt never produced a long and complex ancient history, he never started a church, and he never claimed to receive revelations or interview angels. At best William Titt is an analogue to the young Joseph portrayed in the documents Morgan thinks most accurate—always the confused and conflicting tales of the Hurlbut affidavits.

Morgan nearly always gives credence to anti-Mormon sources in crafting his story. Although he searched throughout New England to identify "Walters the magician," and never succeeded, Morgan nevertheless confidently related the infamous *Palmyra Reflector* story (p. 233). While his footnote to the Walters tale provides some documentation, his letters reveal something of the struggle he faced in attempting to identify Walters.⁶⁵ Like Brodie before him, Morgan also relied heavily on the authority of E. D. Howe. He uncritically accepted Willard Chase's and William Stafford's tales of seerstones and moneydigging. When Joseph's own history did not match these wild stories, Morgan complained that "in the autobiography of any but a prophet of God, the experiences Joseph thus lightly passes over would provide one of its most fascinating chapters" (p. 240). Morgan was confident that Joseph's own history could not be trusted: "Scholarship brought to bear, like the action of x-rays or ultra violet light, brings into shadowy definition the surfaces painted over, which at once are striking in revelation of the intent of the artist, the painful evolution of his conception, and his progressive manipulation of reality in the service of his art" (p. 245).

Since Joseph's own history could not be trusted—Joseph Smith's version being "legend and not history" (p. 246)—Morgan set about carefully dissecting that history to uncover what he thought was the real history. He thought that he could demon-

⁶⁵ Morgan's 29 August 1949 letter to Stan Ivins indicates some of the difficulties Morgan faced (pp. 173–74). However, this is only one small sample.

strate that "the idea of a visitation from the Father and the Son was a late improvisation, no part at all of his original design" because it was "entirely unknown to his followers before 1838" (p. 247). This is, of course, Fawn Brodie's original speculation: the First Vision was "sheer invention" after 1838.⁶⁶ In the 1940s neither Brodie nor Morgan had access to the documents which completely refute this speculation. And that fact alone, of which Morgan was so confident, may indicate something of the reliability of his other speculations.

Whatever one may think of Morgan's speculation or of the effort he put into it, it is clear that Joseph talked of the First Vision rather frequently. Of course, the 1832 version of Joseph's history is apparently the earliest written version. However, on 9 November 1835 Joseph told his story to "Joshua, the Jewish Minister"; on 9 October 1835 Joseph told the story to "Bishop Whitney" and "Bishop Partridge"; and on 14 November 1835 Joseph was visited by Erastus Holmes and again related his story. It is not far-fetched to say that Joseph related his vision consistently throughout his life.⁶⁷ Morgan did not indicate why it would be in Joseph's self-interest to invent the First Vision, although Morgan was confident he did, and whatever he may have thought on the question, Morgan was just plain wrong.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ In the face of the inconvenient documents, Brodie was forced to revise her initial speculation from 1838 to 1830. So much for a possible test for her theory. She simply changed the date and went on as if nothing had happened to her explanation. *No Man Knows My History*, 25.

⁶⁷ See Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Volume I, Autobiographical and Historical Writings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 6, 114, 125, 137, 272, 390, 409, 430, 444, 448, 461. The journal entry of Alexander Neibaur is especially interesting. Here Joseph relates, a mere month before his death, essentially the 1832 version of the First Vision. Those who are troubled by differences between the various accounts of the First Vision would do well to compare Joseph's first and last account carefully.

⁶⁸ An editor's note laments, "Morgan unfortunately did not have access to the earliest accounts of the First Vision, including an 1832 recital in Joseph Smith's own hand, which only began surfacing in the late 1960s" (p. 374). While it is true that Morgan did not have access to the accounts in the 1940s and 1950s when he was writing, Dean Jessee published all of the newly discovered documents in 1969, some two years before Morgan's death. In 1969 Morgan was still promising his book. See Dean C. Jessee, "The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," *BYU Studies* 9/3 (Spring 1969): 275-94.

One of the issues that Morgan thought settled the question of whether the First Vision actually happened was whether a revival occurred in Palmyra at the time Joseph acknowledged “unusual excitement on the subject of religion” (Joseph Smith—History 1:5). Morgan identified the 1817 and 1824 revivals and concluded:

In other words during all these years, when by the necessities of Mormon history Palmyra should have been in continual spiritual torment, its religious life all of a color to grace under the last of the revivalists, the townfolk were going about their daily labors untroubled by the awful probability that they were children of Wrath and in danger of hell. Not in 1820 as the First Vision would have it, not in 1823 as the Vision of the Angel Moroni would have it, but in 1824 began the revival which has left its indelible impress upon Mormon history (pp. 256–57).

Morgan thought that he had positively identified all the possible revivals in the Palmyra region. He further believed that he had found a firm and incontrovertible test for Joseph’s claims. However, as Richard Bushman points out, it now appears that there were indeed “Methodist camp meetings going on through the Spring of 1820 in the ‘vicinity’ of Palmyra.”⁶⁹ While merely finding a revival does not clear up every seeming problem with Joseph’s story,⁷⁰ once again Morgan was simply wrong on an issue on which he thought Joseph could be tested and found wanting. And it also indicates that Joseph’s own story is still the most reliable indicator of Joseph’s own history.

⁶⁹ Richard L. Bushman, “Just the Facts Please,” review of *Inventing Mormonism: Tradition and the Historical Record*, by H. Michael Marquardt and Wesley P. Walters, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994): 126. Bushman indicates that “Walter A. Norton has discovered a *Palmyra Register* article in the 28 June 1820 issue that reported the death of an intoxicated man in Palmyra village and claimed he obtained liquor at ‘a camp-meeting held in this vicinity.’ When criticized, the editor exonerated the Methodists from blame, as if they were the chief users of the campground, but asserted that the dissolute frequently resorted to the campground for liquor, implying that the grounds were commonly in use.” *Ibid.*, 126–27 n. 3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 127–30.

Near the end of his chapter on the revivals and the First Vision, Morgan explained that Mormons have accepted the "inconsistency" and "impossibility" of Joseph's story because "it was emotionally impossible for the Saints to challenge the integrity of their prophet" (p. 260). He explained that the "whole power and discipline of their faith conditioned them to believe." Morgan does not explain how so many were able to leave the Church in Kirtland and openly criticize Joseph, especially those who had been close to him and witnessed the very events which Joseph supposedly fabricated or embellished in 1838. This sort of inconsistency is not uncommon in Morgan's history, and, unsurprisingly, not uncommon in Brodie's.

Morgan liked to think that Joseph Smith's "story of the visions is not a record of genuine event, objective or subjective, but a literary creation, of which we have both the trial draft and the finished work, revealing Joseph's mind and personality only as any literary work reveals any writer" (p. 260). As it turns out, however, Morgan was simply wrong on every major speculation dealing with the revivals and the First Vision; no good reason exists for the Saints not to believe Joseph's story.

When Morgan turns his hand to explaining how Joseph came to find the plates, he again turns to Hurlbut and to speculation. Morgan is confident that "Joseph had never been able to regard himself as a son of the soil" (p. 264). This is, of course, pure speculation—literary invention, if you will—on Morgan's part. Simply, it may be impossible to know how Joseph regarded himself in the 1820s. Some testimony exists from those who knew him intimately when the translation process had started, but Morgan is either unaware of its existence, or chooses to ignore it.⁷¹ Morgan prefers the tall tales of Peter Ingersoll and the gossip printed in the *Palmyra Reflector*.

Morgan cites an inaccurate account from the *Reflector* printed some four years after the events to describe the contents of the Book of Mormon. According to this account, the book was to provide "an account of the ancient inhabitants (antediluvians) of this country, and where they had deposited their substance, consisting of costly furniture, etc., at the approach of the great del-

⁷¹ See, for example, Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 86.

uge'” (p. 265). But the Book of Mormon contains nothing of the sort. It covers exactly the wrong time period and does not indicate anything of the location of their “substance.” To make matters worse, the newspaper article from which Morgan quotes was printed nearly a year after the Book of Mormon itself was published. By 1831 the editor of the *Reflector* should have known better. It may be indicative, however, of the sort of thing that was expected, just as the popular misreading of the Book of Mormon expected “wigwam temples” and the lost Ten Tribes.⁷²

Like Brodie before him, Morgan thought that the Book of Mormon was first intended to make money. According to Morgan, “as the glorious consummation of the whole affair, from the profits of the work, the Smiths should be enabled ‘to carry into successful operation the moneydigging business’” (p. 267). Of course, living in desperate poverty, Joseph also once thought of getting “the plates for the purpose of getting rich,” but not only did the angel forbid such an activity, even the Book of Mormon itself indicates that “no one shall have them [the record] to get gain.”⁷³

Morgan would like it to appear that Joseph “was never very communicative as to what happened” the night he retrieved the plates (p. 268). He claimed that even Emma “could not be sure that anything at all had happened” (p. 268). Morgan’s source for this is Lucy Smith’s *Biographical Sketches*, which reads as follows: “Mr. Smith, on returning home, asked Emma if she knew whether Joseph had taken the plates from their place of deposit, or if she was able to tell where they were. She said she could not tell where they were, or whether they were removed from their place.”⁷⁴ Morgan reads this as indicating that Emma was not sure

⁷² Alexander Campbell, *Delusions. An Analysis of the Book of Mormon: With an Examination of Its Internal and External Evidences, and a Refutation of Its Pretences to Divine Authority* (Boston: Greene, 1832), 12.

⁷³ Joseph Smith—History 1:46; Moroni 8:14. The language is unchanged in the first edition of the Book of Mormon, 532–33. Joseph tells the same story in his 1832 history, “I had been tempted of the adversary and saught [*sic*] the Plates to obtain riches and kept not the commandment that I should have an eye single to the glory of God.” Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith* 1:8. I would like to thank Laurel Howard for helping me track down these references.

⁷⁴ Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother Lucy Mack Smith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, n.d.), 106.

that Joseph really had the plates. It may be, however, that Emma was unwilling to reveal the location of the plates, being under obligation not to divulge the spot, even if Joseph had told her. Morgan went on to indicate, on the authority of the same source, that "Emma was remarkably vague upon the subject in view of the fact that she had accompanied Joseph on that historic night; she did not know where the plates were, or even whether Joseph had removed them from their ancient hiding place" (p. 270). Morgan does not consider the possibility that Emma was unwilling, rather than unable, to tell where the plates were.

Morgan was, however, willing to concede that "the plates were thus not a *pure* figment of Joseph's imagination, despite the fact that no one was ever permitted to examine them" (p. 272). He relied on a report that Joseph had told Willard Chase the plates "weighed between forty and sixty pounds, and Martin Harris agreed" (p. 272). Morgan was confident that when Joseph found the plates he still had not thought that they might have a religious content (pp. 274-75). Morgan did not have access to the 1832 account of Joseph's early visions, had already dismissed the 1838 account as a late fabrication, and uncritically accepted the Hurlbut affidavits. He was thus able to claim that Martin Harris was responsible for providing religious content to the plates. "In this fact," speculates Morgan—there is nothing on which to base the statement—"Joseph could find matter for meditation. Men could be moved by their religious beliefs as by no other means, for religious faith dignified and ennobled what it touched" (p. 275). It was at that juncture, according to Morgan, that "not folk magic, but religion should henceforth be his sphere" (p. 275). Morgan thinks it would be an easy thing for Joseph and Martin Harris to "rearrange their memories, perceive what was reality in the seeming reality, and substitute the reality for the seeming" (p. 275). We have Dale Morgan to thank for helping us to see that everyone who is a firsthand witness to these events was in a fundamental sense self-deceived!

Morgan reports Joseph Smith's first meeting with Oliver Cowdery, using Cowdery's history from the *Messenger and Advocate*. But, quick to cast doubt upon Cowdery's story, Morgan turns to an obvious and clumsy forgery, *Defense in a Rehearsal of My Grounds for Separating Myself from the Latter Day Saints*.

Morgan gives credence to the story that “Cowdery . . . received baptism from Joseph’s hand, ‘by the direction of the Angel of God, whose voice, as it has since struck me, did most mysteriously resemble the voice of Elder Sidney Rigdon, who, I am sure had no part in the transactions of that day, as the Angel was John the Baptist, which I doubt not and deny not’” (p. 392). Could Morgan have been unaware that no known press existed in Norton, Ohio, when this was supposedly published?⁷⁵

When considering the testimony of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, Morgan fell back on the favorite line from Mark Twain, “‘I could not feel more satisfied and at rest if the entire Whitmer family had testified’” (p. 304). This deals neatly with the witnesses, but does not address a single issue of exactly what they saw. Morgan relates the yarn from Thomas Ford that the witnesses saw only an empty box and that Joseph forced them to pray “for more than two hours” until “they were now persuaded that they saw the plates” (p. 304). Like Fawn Brodie,⁷⁶ Morgan narrows Ford’s tale to the eight witnesses, but Ford himself does not limit it in that way. Morgan does not indicate exactly how Thomas Ford, and Ford alone, could have come across this valuable information, and he is persuaded by the story without any corroboration. Morgan also ignores hundreds of pages of testi-

⁷⁵ Morgan seems naive and uncritical. According to Richard L. Anderson, “Not only does Cowdery have no 1839 connection with the place of publication; not only does the supposed location have no known press—but also no known original of this pamphlet has been found. It came from an anti-Mormon organization in 1906 with the fanfare of a new discovery, but was totally unmentioned in Oliver Cowdery’s lifetime in Mormon publications (which typically refuted attacks in this period) or non-Mormon publications (which would not have passed up the printed renunciation of the key assistant to Joseph Smith). Furthermore, when Oliver returned to the Church and was closely questioned on what he had published about Mormonism while out of the Church, the above item was not ever named.” Richard L. Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 172. Morgan never hints at the late publication date, preferring to cite the supposed 1839 publication date. The editor’s note generously concedes that there “is some question among scholars whether this document, which can only be traced to 1906, is legitimate” (p. 392 n. 20).

⁷⁶ Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 79–80.

mony from David Whitmer, who told a remarkably consistent story throughout his life.⁷⁷

Morgan also claims that Joseph engaged in “unabashed hocus-pocus” and a “sustained sleight-of-hand performance” for eighteen months while writing the Book of Mormon (p. 278). What exactly constitutes “hocus-pocus” Morgan does not explain.⁷⁸ It may be that he had nothing other than Fawn Brodie’s explanation in mind when borrowing her words. Nevertheless it does nothing to explain how Joseph was able to produce the large and complex Book of Mormon.

Admittedly, though, Morgan does not see the Book of Mormon as especially complex. It is, for him, a history of “a white-skinned and delightful folk, the Nephites, and a savage race, the Lamanites, cursed by the Lord with a dark skin” (pp. 280–81). Careful readers of the Book of Mormon will notice the subtle changes from the actual text of the Book of Mormon. Nephites are described as “white and delightful,” with nothing being said specifically about their skin, while Lamanites are described as being cursed with a skin of blackness (2 Nephi 5:21).⁷⁹ Morgan no doubt believed that this was meant to function as an explanation for the color of the Indian’s skin. Morgan also apparently subscribes to something like a hemispheric model of Book of Mormon geography, claiming that “their battlefields [were] still marked by great mounds the length and breadth of the Mississippi Valley” (p. 281). Morgan is never more specific than this on the question of Book of Mormon geography. Unfortunately for Morgan’s theory, the Book of Mormon makes no reference at all to the Mississippi Valley or to the moundbuilders.

Morgan explained the Book of Mormon as having “evolved naturally from the circumstances of Joseph Smith’s growing up,

⁷⁷ See Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon*, 159–61. Anderson traces the way in which Thomas Ford’s account has improved with the telling. Anyone serious about confronting the testimony of the witnesses, and not merely dismissing them, should consult Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, and David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, MO: Privately Printed, 1887).

⁷⁸ See Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 85.

⁷⁹ Morgan ignores 3 Nephi 2:15, which indicates that “their skin became white like unto the Nephites.” This is the last reference in the Book of Mormon to skin that is not animal skin.

the world he lived in, his interests and his needs" (p. 310).⁸⁰ "The cultural environment," Morgan assured us, "was . . . so rich in suggestion that the idea may have occurred to him independently. We will never be sure, for Joseph himself would never acknowledge that anything but the power of God entered into the writing of his book" (p. 310). Again, like Brodie, Morgan was confident that *View of the Hebrews* influenced Joseph and quoted extensively from it.⁸¹ Morgan did not note the vast number of differences between the Book of Mormon and *View of the Hebrews*.⁸² While Ethan Smith found the seemingly popular Ten Tribes theory of Indian origin convincing, the Book of Mormon is resolutely silent on the Ten Tribes. Morgan noted that "both books quoted extensively and almost exclusively from Isaiah" (p. 312) but failed to note that they quote quite different passages and that the Book of Mormon quotes far more extensively from Isaiah. (It is also true that the Book of Mormon, contrary to Morgan's assertion, also quotes from other portions of the Bible.)

Morgan was, however, cautious to hedge his bets on *View of the Hebrews* as a source for the Book of Mormon. "As impressive as are the parallels . . .," he said, "we need not insist upon them" (p. 313). The reason was that "the ideas common to the two

⁸⁰ See Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 69.

⁸¹ Unfortunately, Morgan made no footnote at this critical point. He had access to Brodie's copy of B. H. Roberts's "Parallel," and that is the likely source for this quotation, although Morgan examined, at one point, the 1825 edition of *View of the Hebrews*. The quotation can be found in Brigham D. Madsen, ed., *Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 332–33. I have been unable to locate the lines in question in the 1823 edition of *View of the Hebrews*, which would tend to weaken Morgan's case (because Joseph was more likely to have had access to the 1823 edition and apparently was already talking about the Book of Mormon before 1825). By the same token, the greatly enlarged 1825 edition contained more material and hence is the preferred source for those attacking the Book of Mormon. The large amount of additional material in the 1825 edition is seldom, if ever, mentioned. The lack of a footnote may indicate that Morgan was reluctant to cite his actual source. B. H. Roberts's "Parallel" traveled unofficially through the Mormon underground for many years before finally being published in 1985.

⁸² For a short and concise study on the difficulties of the Ethan Smith theory, see "View of the Hebrews: 'An Unparallel,'" in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 83–87.

books” were “the common property of their generation” (p. 313). This is a common bit of begging the question on Morgan’s part which lets nothing whatever count against his theory.⁸³

Morgan makes the common mistake of claiming that the plates “had been hidden away in the Hill Cumorah” (p. 314).⁸⁴ It is indicative of his less than careful reading of the Book of Mormon that he claims that, “driven northward by their relentless enemies, the Nephites had built the great mounds of the Mississippi and Ohio valleys” (p. 314). Morgan thus “solved the mystery of the mound builders” (p. 314). Again, unfortunately, the word “mound” does not occur in the Book of Mormon, neither does anything that would indicate the Mississippi or the Ohio.

Although it did not make it into his book, Morgan at one time entertained the popular notion that “part of the original appeal of the Book of Mormon was the anti-Masonic sentiment permeating it.”⁸⁵ There was no need for Morgan to have been so coy with his assertion since *No Man Knows My History* contained an extensive elaboration of “Gadanton Masonry” in the Book of Mormon.⁸⁶ Once again, however, either Morgan or Brodie should have checked to see if anyone in the 1830s read Masonry into the Book of Mormon. Although many saw the fullness of the Gospel in the Book of Mormon, as we do today, there does not seem to be anyone who joined the Church saying, “thank goodness, in the Book of Mormon I have finally found the perfect expression of my anti-Masonry.”⁸⁷

⁸³ When I reviewed Robert N. Hullinger’s *Joseph Smith’s Response to Skepticism*, I did not realize that this particular form of question-begging had a history, let alone one as ancient as Dale Morgan’s explanation of Joseph Smith. Gary F. Novak, “Examining the Environmental Explanation of the Book of Mormon,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 149–50.

⁸⁴ Mormon 6:6 indicates that Mormon “hid up in the hill Cumorah all the records which had been entrusted to me by the hand of the Lord, save it were these few plates which I gave unto my son Moroni.” These are the plates of the Book of Mormon. Moroni does not indicate where he hid “the plates of Nephi.”

⁸⁵ Morgan to Brodie, 2 August 1947, Brodie Papers, bx 7, fld 10, p. 1.

⁸⁶ Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 65–66.

⁸⁷ Susan Easton Black’s *Stories from the Early Saints: Converted by the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1992) documents the way in which some early Saints read the Book of Mormon. There is exactly nothing of mound-

Unfortunately, Morgan did not know that, even as he wrote the line "the most anachronistic feature of the book was the introduction into it of Christian themes," the great libraries of the Qumran community were being discovered, with all their seeming Christian overtones.⁸⁸ "Long before the time of Christ, the Nephites, as Joseph developed their story, believed in him as the Redeemer, worshipped in his name and even sought to be reconciled to the Father through an atonement yet to be made" (p. 317). All of this sounds remarkably similar to the unquestionably ancient documents discovered at Qumran.

Morgan concludes his analysis of the Book of Mormon saying,

The eminently personal character of the Book of Mormon extends far beyond its incidental revelation of Joseph's lack of learning. In a sense it is a truer autobiography than the formal account he later gave the world, for quite unconsciously it mirrors his mind, both its quality and the character of its ideas and interests. The absorption of his society in the mystery of the moundbuilders and the origin of the American Indians, its rapt interest in folk magic, the periodic interruption of its religious anxieties and ecstasies, its naive assurance in the divinely ordained future of America, all are presented in Joseph's book with as much assurance as the cracker-barrel sage of any village store. If all this, which gave flesh and blood to a fictional history designed to be read as living history, was received with conviction, it was because he brought to it an elemental simplicity which returned all controversies to the ultimate authority of the scriptures. (p. 318)

builders or anti-Masonry. Those who mention "a branch of Israel" seem to make no mistakes about the Book of Mormon containing anything on the lost tribes. The most extensive treatment of anti-Masonry in the Book of Mormon is Daniel C. Peterson, "Notes on 'Gadianton Masonry,'" in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 174-224.

⁸⁸ There is, of course, an extraordinarily large literature on this subject. See, for example, Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, ed. John W. Welch, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 193-98; 265-74.

Morgan simply misread the Book of Mormon—it gives no explanation of the moundbuilders of the Mississippi and Ohio and no hard and fast explanation of the origin of the American Indians. In all of this, and in forcing the Book of Mormon to “mirror Joseph’s mind,” Morgan was following the trail blazed by Fawn Brodie, with very little of his own to add.

The Influence of *On Early Mormonism*

Dale Morgan’s unfinished history has had little, if any, influence in the community of those who know or care about Mormon history. No one cites *On Early Mormonism* as an authority for some opinion on Joseph Smith. Morgan was wrong about the questions he thought he had settled definitively. There may be those who regret that Morgan was unable to finish his Mormon history and hence may regard it as a loss.⁸⁹ However this may be, Morgan’s greatest influence lies in his correspondence. I am told by those running the Special Collections at the University of Utah that the Madeline Reeder McQuown collection is among the most frequently used. By contrast, Fawn Brodie’s papers are kept in storage and must be requested one day before their desired use. I seriously doubt that those who are interested in Brigham Young paw through McQuown’s papers looking for clues into her “amazing” research into Brother Brigham.⁹⁰ I have no doubt that cultural Mormons still find solace in the studied and dogmatic unbelief of Dale Morgan, and this no doubt accounts for at least some of the popularity of the McQuown and Morgan Collections.

Still, part of the Morgan myth is that his unfinished history would have been one to have been reckoned with. But, by the standards of the times in which we find ourselves, it is outdated. Dale Morgan spent his entire life digging through libraries and archives. His deafness denied him distractions like radio and television, which limit the intellectual activities of others. Yet in all the

⁸⁹ For example, Gary Topping, “Dale Morgan’s Unfinished Mormon History,” review of *Dale Morgan On Early Mormonism*, *Dialogue* 20/1 (Spring 1987): 174.

⁹⁰ It is only stretching the truth a little to claim that Dale Morgan did all the research for that book.

years of archival research Morgan was never able to turn up a single item which touched Joseph Smith's story.⁹¹

John Phillip Walker, as well as Gary Topping and a few others, promote the myth that Morgan was unable to finish his great work "because of a protracted series of sidetracks."⁹² But this simply cannot, in all honesty, be accepted at face value. Morgan could turn out books and articles on the less challenging American Western history at astonishing rates (especially considering that he worked without the benefit of a computer). Morgan was unable to finish his history of Mormonism, in part at least, because he was never able to deal satisfactorily with Joseph's visions and with the Book of Mormon. Despite his confident talk, and overlooking the technical flaws, Morgan's environmental explanation has something fundamentally unsatisfactory about it. And Morgan may have sensed it.

Concluding Unscientific Postscript: Notes Toward a Cautionary Tale on the Soft Underbelly of Cultural Mormonism

If, as I believe I have demonstrated, what Morgan's editor calls "The History" is anything but the definitive treatment of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon—not to mention the entire sweep of Mormon history, which is what he wanted to write for most of his adult life—is there something of value in *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism*? As I have indicated, this book consists of both the sketchy early chapters for what Morgan hoped to be the definitive history of the Mormon past and a rather good collection of his vast correspondence. If Morgan failed to write the definitive naturalistic account of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, if

⁹¹ This is not to say that the Saints as a whole, in 1945, had not lapsed into forgetfulness about things like seerstones. Seerstones are, nevertheless, part of Joseph Smith's telling of his own story.

⁹² Topping, "Dale Morgan," 173. Walker, "Editor's Introduction," 15. See also LeAnn Cragun's "Mormons and History: In Control of the Past" (Ph.D. diss., University of Hawaii, 1981), which lionizes Morgan under the influence of Brodie. Cf. also Clara V. Dobay, "Intellect and Faith: The Controversy over Revisionist Mormon History," *Dialogue* 27/1 (Spring 1994): 91–105, especially 104.

what he did write now seems badly flawed, can something be salvaged from his correspondence?

Dale Morgan wrote to Bernard DeVoto and wryly noted that “we have three people sitting in our sanity commission and can quarrel amiably among ourselves (comforted by the knowledge that regardless of our findings, few people will ever find out about them and fewer still give a damn)” (p. 106). It is one of the ironies of Morgan’s own history that this prophecy has failed. Dale Morgan kept virtually all of his own correspondence and the correspondence he received. It is not stretching the truth to say that among the various collections of papers deposited in libraries and historical societies along the Wasatch Front lie the materials from which could be written the history of early cultural Mormonism.

Such a history would necessarily include, if we followed D. Michael Quinn and Brodie, details of the personal lives of those involved on the fringes of the Church. It seems impolite to insist on an “intimate” history of people like Dale Morgan and Fawn Brodie, and, no doubt, some of that history would be unseemly. An intellectual history would be more tasteful and better serve the interests of comity. The two histories, however, cannot be told separately, as if one had nothing to do with the other.

Those who are the intellectual children and stepchildren, and in some cases stepgrandchildren, of Brodie and Morgan should also have pause to reflect. The fringes of cultural Mormonism have become increasingly radical in the last few years, promoting a variety of ideologies and “isms.” There can be little doubt that some future historian will dig through the letters, memos, and e-mail left behind by this group. Destroying the documents seems to have little effect; if Madeline Reeder McQuown thought she could censor Dale Morgan by destroying his letters, she did not stop to consider that Morgan kept a copy of virtually everything he sent her. Other copies of correspondence show up in curious places—in the papers of Fawn Brodie, Stan Ivins, and Juanita Brooks, to name only a few.

I have no doubt that this future history will take into account all the sorts of things that historians like D. Michael Quinn just love to talk about. It will be meaty and earthy and will attempt to get at “the man” (or woman, as the case may be). The first hints at the course such a history of cultural Mormonism might take are

just starting to appear. The story is likely to be enlightening, embarrassing and, in an ironic way, faith-promoting, all at the same time.