



Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011

Volume 13 | Number 1

Article 8

2001

Comments on Critical Exchanges

Louis Midgley

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

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Midgley, Louis (2001) "Comments on Critical Exchanges," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011*: Vol. 13 : No. 1 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol13/iss1/8>

This Mormon Studies is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011 by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.



NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

Title Comments on Critical Exchanges

Author(s) Louis Midgley

Reference *FARMS Review of Books* 13/1 (2001): 91-126.

ISSN 1099-9450 (print), 2168-3123 (online)

Abstract Review of “A Hard Day for Professor Midgley: An Essay for Fawn McKay Brodie” (1999), by Glen J. Hettinger.

COMMENTS ON CRITICAL EXCHANGES

Louis Midgley

Indignation is a bad counselor. Our indignation proves at best that we are well meaning. It does not prove that we are right.

Leo Strauss¹

To see what Glen Hettinger is attempting to accomplish by publishing his critique of me, I believe that an awareness of the larger context of the conversation about Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims, in which Hettinger's essay plays a polemical role, is needed. Since he is attacking me, this must include an indication of why I have given any attention at all to Fawn Brodie and what that attention has actually consisted of.

A Brief Prolegomenon

For two decades I have been attentive to the question of how writers, whether believers or not, explain the Book of Mormon (and hence also how they attempt to account for Joseph Smith). In a few instances I have been able to engage in fruitful conversations with

1. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 6.

Review of Glen J. Hettinger, "A Hard Day for Professor Midgley: An Essay for Fawn McKay Brodie," *Dialogue* 32/1 (1999): 91–101.

those who maintain differing opinions.² I hold that historical accounts, as well as the related understanding of certain texts, play a crucial role in the perpetuation of the Latter-day Saint community of faith and memory.³ I have examined various accounts of the Book of Mormon in which it is read as nineteenth-century fiction fashioned by Joseph Smith, either knowingly or unknowingly, out of sources floating around his immediate environment. I have shown that these accounts are flawed; when critics have read the Book of Mormon as fiction, they have not been able to coherently explain its contents or origins.⁴ To begin to read the Book of Mormon as other than an au-

2. One example, of three or four that I can recall, is an exchange with Professor Martin E. Marty, who is perhaps the leading American Protestant church historian. See Louis Midgley, "The Acids of Modernity and the Crisis in Mormon Historiography," in *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History*, ed. George D. Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 189–225. Marty's views were presented as the Tanner Lecture at the 1983 Mormon History Association meeting. His talk was published under the title "Two Integrities: An Address to the Crisis in Mormon Historiography," in the *Journal of Mormon History* 10 (1983): 3–19. It was reprinted, with slight changes, as "History: The Case of the Mormons, a Special People," in Marty's *Religion and Republic: The American Circumstance* (Boston: Beacon, 1987), 303–25, 377–78, and then reprinted under its original title in *Faithful History*, 169–88. I consider my exchange with Professor Marty to be a model of the civility possible when crucial issues are explored. For an earlier and somewhat different response to Professor Marty, see Louis Midgley, "The Challenge of Historical Consciousness: Mormon History and the Encounter with Secular Modernity," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:502–51.

3. I am not concerned with peripheral issues. I deplore depictions of the Saints as faultless heroes. I like much of what is currently being published on the Mormon past. I see vast improvement in Mormon studies, including the work of historians, both Latter-day Saint and otherwise, since World War II. On the other hand, I also prefer candor about the faults of critics of the Latter-day Saints. I expect openness and honesty about historians in particular and other intellectuals in general.

4. See, for example, Louis Midgley, "Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? The Critics and Their Theories," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997), 101–39; and Louis Midgley, "'To Remember and Keep': On the Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book," in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000), 95–137.

thentic ancient text radically transmogrifies both the ground and content of faith.⁵

During much of 1999 and 2000, I lived in Auckland, New Zealand, where my wife and I directed the Lorne Street Institute of Religion as auxiliary CES missionaries. The Saints, cuisine, and countryside were simply wonderful. But other additional, noteworthy sources of pleasure arose when American friends provided me with two copies of Hettinger's little screed from *Dialogue* and regaled me with accounts of how D. Michael Quinn, a former Mormon historian, had decorated the new edition of his *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*⁶ with unseemly personal attacks on Latter-day Saints who have criticized his work and opinions. I will demonstrate that both Quinn (and Hettinger) reduce intellectual issues to conflicts between Good Guys and Bad Guys. Though I am sympathetic with those who have identified problems with Quinn's approach and book,⁷ I really like some things about his book. I will explain.

5. To see exactly what happens to a religious community when a radical revision is made in its founding story, one has only to note the bewilderment, disaffection, splintering, and rapid decline of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (now called Community of Christ) that have taken place, at least in part, as a result of officially sponsored and approved revisionist readings of the Book of Mormon and of other equally fundamental revisions in their traditional understanding of themselves. These developments may be partly the result of imitating the way liberal Protestants have dealt with the crucial historical substance in the New Testament. For details, see Louis Midgley, "The Radical Reformation of the Reorganization of the Restoration: Recent Changes in the RLDS Understanding of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (1993): 132–63; and Louis Midgley, "More Revisionist Legerdemain and the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 (1991): 295–301.

6. D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, rev. and enl. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998). I had not yet seen a copy of the new edition of Quinn's book before I left for New Zealand on 7 January 1999.

7. See John Gee, "An Obstacle to Deeper Understanding," *FARMS Review of Books* 12/2 (2000): 185–224; William J. Hamblin, "That Old Black Magic," *FARMS Review of Books* 12/2 (2000): 225–393; and Rhett S. James, "Writing History Must Not Be an Act of 'Magic,'" *FARMS Review of Books* 12/2 (2000): 395–414. One ought also to consult Klaus J. Hansen, "Quinn'speak," *FARMS Review of Books* 10/1 (1998): 132–40; and George L. Mitton and Rhett S. James, "A Response to D. Michael Quinn's Homosexual Distortion of Latter-day Saint History," *FARMS Review of Books* 10/1 (1998): 141–263, for significant, detailed criticisms of Quinn's approach to the Mormon past.

Anthony Grafton has noted that satirists have recently invented terms like *Fußnotenwissenschaft* or *Fußnotologie*⁸ to describe those who make a fetish of their footnotes. And I agree with those who have pointed out that Quinn seems inclined to float along half-submerged in his often bloated footnotes. But one can learn much from looking deeply into some of those notes. Why? "To the inexpert, footnotes look like deep root systems, solid and fixed; to the connoisseur, . . . they reveal themselves as anthills, swarming with constructive and combative activity."⁹ So I regularly turn to notes in essays to see what, if anything, is going on just beneath the surface. Grafton has shown that one important function of footnotes is to "confer authority on a writer." And Quinn appeals to his notes to bolster his authority. Grafton adds that "unlike other types of credentials . . . footnotes sometimes afford entertainment—normally in the form of daggers stuck in the backs of the author's colleagues."¹⁰ And so it is with Quinn. I have combed some of the footnotes (actually endnotes) in Quinn's magic book to see what wounds he has tried to inflict on his critics. He is, I sadly conclude, engaged in polemic against various writers, whom he labels "polemicists"; their offense is that they have not genuflected before the edifice of his scholarship.

But some things hidden away in Quinn's notes please me. I will provide one juicy and instructive example. Since 15 October 1981, in bouts of correspondence with Quinn,¹¹ I have attempted to explain to him exactly what my concerns are with what I sometimes call revisionist Mormon history.¹² Until now he has been unable or unwilling

8. See Anthony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 25.

9. Ibid., 9.

10. Ibid., 8.

11. Which I will make available to any interested party. I rather like the idea of future archival evidence being available to everyone now. Those who make a living from the debris collected in archives should have no objections to having some of their papers made readily available.

12. By "revisionist" I do not mean what Quinn seems to have in mind by that term. What I use that term to identify are efforts to read the Book of Mormon as "frontier fiction," to use Fawn Brodie's expression (see *No Man Knows My History* [New York: Knopf, 1945], 67), or to explain Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims in secular or naturalistic

to accept my position. Instead, he has accused me of being a stalking horse for some evil enterprise hatched by the Brethren, which he imagines is aimed at presumably innocent historians whose only concern is advancing Quinnlike "truth" about the Mormon past. Or he has complained that I am actually faulting the work of all Mormon historians (or at least those he chooses to label "new Mormon historians,"¹³ an ambiguous label he uses to include virtually everyone except those he charges with being defenders of "traditional" Mormon history). Neither of these charges is true.

Now, for the very first time, Quinn has shown that he both understands and agrees with my position on historical treatments of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. I am gratified by this. He now grants the following: "I agree with FARMS writer Louis Midgley that there is a 'Great Divide' in Mormon studies between historians who believe that Joseph Smith was 'a genuine prophet' (as Smith defined himself) and those who do not."¹⁴ Quinn is actually agreeing with Dale Morgan, who fashioned the label "Great Divide" to identify a watershed between various often competing and even inconsistent naturalistic explanations of Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims on the one side and the accounts written by faithful Latter-day Saints on the other. All Quinn and I now have to do is work out which historians are on which side of the Great Divide, and he can then begin to confront those naturalistic accounts that should necessarily displease him. Since he constantly proclaims that he is a believer and that he

terms, that is, as a conscious, intentional fraud (Dale Morgan and Fawn Brodie's original explanation) or as a manifestation of mysticism, myth, magic, or madness (in various more recent accounts by cultural Mormons). Quinn seems to use the label "revisionist" to identify anyone who supplements, modifies, enlarges, or corrects any detail in any earlier account of the Mormon past, or anyone who takes up some new topic.

13. For critical commentary on Quinn's ambiguous label, "new Mormon history," see Louis Midgley, review of *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past*, ed. by D. Michael Quinn, *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 13 (1993): 118–21.

14. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (1998 ed.), 352 n. 98. The expression "FARMS writer" is gratuitous and part of Quinn's persistent effort to disparage by branding with labels. He thereby avoids a genuine confrontation with arguments and evidence.

even wants to be known as a conservative apologist for the faith of the Latter-day Saints (one, we assume, committed to defending the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon from any and all counter-explanations), there should be at least some evidence that he is willing to join with those he denigrates as "FARMS polemicists" in responding to attempts to read the Book of Mormon as "frontier fiction."

After Quinn concedes that Morgan was right about a Great Divide, distinguishing two approaches to Joseph Smith's truth claims and also proclaims that he is on the believing side of this watershed, he then complains that I go wrong because I toss any writer I presumably "dislike"¹⁵ "into the category of disbeliever, anti-Mormon, or 'cultural Mormon.'"¹⁶ He then cites one of my essays to demonstrate that I have done these terrible things.¹⁷ However, in the essay Quinn cites, I have not indiscriminately placed anyone on the wrong side of the Great Divide. On one page that he cites, all I did was indicate that Dale Morgan, who was a solid unbeliever, liked to refer to a Great Divide when explaining Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. Then I demonstrated that Bernard DeVoto had a different naturalistic explanation for Joseph Smith from the one favored by Morgan and Brodie.¹⁸ On the other two pages that Quinn cites as evidence of my perversity, I have not tossed anyone into any category. Instead, I provided a detailed examination of the naturalistic explanation of Joseph Smith proposed by Marvin Hill. Quinn does not examine my argument. Nor does he propose a way of demonstrating that Hill's call for an explanation of Joseph Smith that would begin by rejecting what Hill seems to believe was the "fallacious"—Hill's word and not mine—notion that Joseph Smith was a genuine prophet should not

15. Quinn does not distinguish between rejecting an argument and disliking a person. I have affection for some writers whose opinions I oppose, and I reject some explanations without having any sense of disliking their authors. It is not the writers but the arguments that are the issue.

16. Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* (1998 ed.), 352 n. 98.

17. See *ibid.* Quinn cites my essay entitled "F. M. Brodie—'The Fasting Hermit and Very Saint of Ignorance': A Biographer and Her Legend," *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996): 157, 221, 223 (hereafter "A Biographer and Her Legend").

18. *Ibid.*, 157.

place Hill's explanation on Morgan's side of the Great Divide. Quinn also neglects to confront my detailed analysis of his own strange squeamishness about Brodie. Moreover, he disregards my demonstration that his summary of Brodie's argument was confused and that his own treatment of the tales about Joseph Smith's presumed involvement with magic in some ways seems to parallel parts of Brodie's account.

Though Quinn claims that he wants to be known as a conservative apologist, he is clearly not viewed that way by sectarian anti-Mormons.¹⁹ Actually, his speculation about the role of magic in the restoration has come to supplement, if not replace, Brodie's biography of Joseph Smith in the arsenal of weapons used by critics of Mormonism. If Quinn wants to help defend and build the kingdom, he needs to stop his wanton intellectual attacks on writers who have some essays published by FARMS. He needs to listen to criticisms from within the community of Saints and make adjustments in his style, tone, and presentation that will clearly signal to everyone that he is not advancing merely another highly confused naturalistic explanation of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims. He will also have to show how the discussion in his magic book can be made into a coherent account, one that does not explain away the faith of the Saints.

In 1981, when I first started evaluating various writers' explanations of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's prophetic charisms, I focused on Marvin Hill's treatment of the Mormon past. I had read the tenuous assessment of Mormon historiography Hill wrote when he was a student at Chicago,²⁰ but I had ignored his other writings until he published two review essays of the second edition of Fawn

19. See, for example, the extraordinary William (Bill) J. Schnobelen, "We Thank Thee, O God for a Warlock!": A Christian Critique of D. Michael Quinn's *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*," *Saints Alive Journal* (Winter 1987): 1–12. One of many conclusions drawn by Schnobelen is that "what Quinn has done is to build a great case for Mormonism being a gnosti-occult heresy" (*ibid.*, 12).

20. Marvin S. Hill, "The Historiography of Mormonism," *Church History* 28/4 (December 1959): 418–26.

Brodie's biography of Joseph Smith.²¹ In those essays Hill argued, among other things, that the numerous and sometimes rather obvious flaws in Fawn Brodie's research and argumentation had opened the possibility of discovering "the broad, promising middle ground" between genuine prophet as understood by the Saints and what he called "faker."²² I have shown that the real distinction is between prophet and not-prophet.²³ And one nice way of setting forth this distinction is to use Morgan's expression, the "Great Divide."

Of course, many theorists treat Joseph Smith as other than a genuine prophet, but only some of them accuse him of conscious fraud. Brodie argued in 1945 that Joseph Smith was deliberately involved in deception, and it was only later in 1971 that she began to draw on abnormal psychology to supplement her earlier opinion. Hill seems to be arguing that Joseph Smith was neither an intentional fraud nor a victim of some pathology. Instead, Hill pictures Joseph Smith as a rustic, deeply involved in magic, superstition, and mysticism (none of which he defines), activities which separate Joseph from genuine prophets. Hill argues that these practices and beliefs constituted what was then thought of as religion, at least on the margins of society. So he grants that Joseph Smith was in some sense reli-

21. See Marvin S. Hill, "Brodie Revisited: A Reappraisal," *Dialogue* 7/4 (1972): 72-85; and his "Secular or Sectarian History? A Critique of *No Man Knows My History*," *Church History* 43/1 (March 1974): 78-96, reprinted without changes in *Reconsidering No Man Knows My History: Fawn M. Brodie and Joseph Smith in Retrospect*, ed. Newell G. Bringhurst (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1996), 60-93. Hill was clearing the way for an attempt to replace Brodie's account of Joseph Smith with his own, which work was eventually published by his sister; see Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1977). Fawn Brodie thought that Hill's biography was timid and immature. See Brodie, review in *Pacific Historical Review* 48/1 (February 1979): 129-32.

22. Hill, "Secular or Sectarian History," 83.

23. See Louis Midgley, "No Middle Ground: The Debate over the Authenticity of the Book of Mormon," in *Historicity and the Latter-day Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2001), 149-70; Louis Midgley, "Faith and History," in *To Be Learned Is Good If . . .*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 119-226; Midgley, "The Challenge of Historical Consciousness," 502-51; Midgley, "The Acids of Modernity," 189-225; and Louis Midgley, "The Current Battle over the Book of Mormon: 'Is Modernity Itself Somehow Canonical?'" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 200-254.

gious, even though he was involved in, according to Hill, all kinds of nonsense. Hill also insists that Joseph Smith was sincere in his illusions or delusions.²⁴ He reads the Book of Mormon as an indication of Joseph Smith's theological speculations up to 1830 and sees it as mediating between Calvinism and Arminianism. It should not be all that difficult for Quinn to figure out on which side of the Great Divide to situate such a stance. If he believes that I have somehow grossly misunderstood Hill, he should provide a detailed commentary on his views to show where I have gone wrong. He has failed to do this.

Early on, I could find only a couple of rather timid efforts by Latter-day Saint scholars to suggest that the Book of Mormon should be read as Joseph Smith's first attempt to set forth a theology, couched in the form of a "history." In my first endeavor to examine these issues, I focused my attention exclusively on views set out by Marvin Hill (and Klaus Hansen).²⁵ I did this in a paper I presented in the Historiography and Mormonism session of the annual meeting of the Western History Association on 15 October 1981 in San Antonio, Texas.²⁶ I entitled my paper "The Question of Faith and History" (and will refer to it as such here), but D. Michael Quinn, who organized that

24. See Midgley, "A Biographer and Her Legend," 210–21, for a detailed examination of Hill's position. See also Midgley, "The Current Battle over the Book of Mormon," 206–7; and Midgley, "Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?" 122–23, for additional comments on Hill's stance.

25. Klaus J. Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). Hansen's work provided an additional example of the kind of argument I wished to examine.

26. When I began discussing these issues with Mormon historians, I discovered that those who entertained revisionist proclivities were a shy and retiring lot, given to neither clarity nor boldness. Aside from the few RLDS for whom the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims were no longer issues, the revisionist minority among Mormon historians had some idea of when to speak and when to be silent. They were soon replaced by a generation of cultural Mormons who were not part of the old Mormon history club. These new critics were bold and adventuresome. The current attack on the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon thus comes from the fringes of the Mormon intellectual community and not from inside the club. For an example of this approach to the Book of Mormon, see the ten essays included in Brent Lee Metcalfe, ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology* (Salt Lake

session, insisted on calling it "A Critique of Mormon Historians." I am neither qualified nor interested in critiquing all Mormon historians, nor was I then.

When I delivered that paper, I obviously faced a hostile audience—one well-prepared by Marvin Hill (and also, for somewhat different reasons, by Thomas G. Alexander), with the help of Quinn, to believe that I was targeting *all* Mormon historians and that I had in mind *all* of what they had been publishing. Neither Jan Shippo nor Davis Bitton, who commented on my paper, addressed my arguments and analysis. The paper Shippo read was soon published, with my name removed.²⁷ I doubt that her remarks constitute one of her more distinguished contributions to Mormon studies, and I note that she did not reproduce them in a recent anthology of her writings.²⁸

Three weeks after I presented my paper in San Antonio, Quinn launched an attack on me and also on Elders Boyd K. Packer and Ezra Taft Benson in a talk he delivered to a group of BYU history students.²⁹ I eventually wrote a six-page, single-spaced letter to Quinn outlining exactly how, among other things, he had misunderstood and hence distorted my views. I refrained from publishing a criticism of his paper because he had obviously not understood and hence not

City: Signature Books, 1993). Among the ten critics of the Book of Mormon whose essays were included in this book, only David P. Wright, a competent biblical scholar but not a Mormon historian, has held an academic position. With the retirement of the old guard among Mormon historians, my attention has shifted almost exclusively to accounts written by those outside the conventional boundaries of the history profession.

27. Jan Shippo, "The Mormon Past: Revealed or Revisited?" *Sunstone*, November–December 1981, 55–57. Please note that she read this paper on 15 October 1981 and that it was published shortly thereafter. My hunch is that for her oral presentation Shippo just patched my name and some comments into a paper that was already prepared for publication. Be that as it may, she clearly did not address the contents of my paper.

28. Jan Shippo, *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

29. See D. Michael Quinn, "On Being a Mormon Historian (and Its Aftermath)," in *Faithful History*, 69–111. Quinn describes this as the "first authorized publication" of his paper. It was immediately picked up by Sandra and Jerald Tanner and is even now circulated by them as part of their anti-Mormon crusade. They claim that Quinn's talk is one of the very best ever delivered by a Mormon historian. Why? Because it attacks some of the Brethren and muddies the waters?

confronted my arguments. Instead, I staunchly defended Quinn from criticisms as he got himself into more trouble with the Saints. I did so because I believed that if he overcame his anger, he would support my efforts to respond to attacks on the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon and on Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims. I assumed that he had blasted away at me because he had not understood my position.

Later in 1981, Quinn claimed that I had "spearheaded an academic assault against recent scholarship in Mormon history." This opinion shows why he retitled my paper "A Critique of Mormon Historians." He already seems to have formed an opinion of my work before he had read a word of it. Quinn complained that I

concluded a 1981 presentation on Mormon historians with the following statement: "It is depressing to see some historians now struggling to get on the stage to act out the role of the mature, honest historian committed to something called 'objective history,' and, at the same time, the role of faithful Saint. The discordance between those roles has produced more than a little bad faith (that is, self-deception) and even, perhaps, some blatant hypocrisy; it has also produced some pretentious, bad history."³⁰

When I wrote the words that so deeply troubled Quinn, I had not read a word that he had written. In 1981, I did not include him among those I had in mind, but I do now. Back then I had to wonder about what seemed to me to be his inordinate defensiveness. If Quinn had bothered to indicate what "bad history" I had in mind, his complaint would have appeared quaint to his readers. As a believer, he must have had, at least in 1981, some concern about efforts to read the Book of Mormon as fiction or to explain Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims away.

I will now provide the larger context for the remarks that so irritated Quinn. In 1981, I wrote as follows:

30. Ibid., 71–72, quoting from my unpublished essay entitled "The Question of Faith and History," 54–55.

Gentiles may wish to struggle to find what they think are appropriate secular categories and explanations of Joseph Smith and artifacts like the Book of Mormon, and there obviously are a host of rather different, often radically contradictory explanations which begin with one or another secular premise. These all result in a flat rejection of Joseph Smith's own understanding of the restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the agency of messengers from another world. Some of these explanations, especially in the past, have manifested outright anger and hatred, others only mild amusement at rustic credulity; some have at times even managed to affect a more respectful tone. I am not sorry to see the hostility reduced. More recently, Joseph Smith has been treated with something approaching sympathetic confusion by gentile and now even by certain Mormon historians. There are some gentile historians who are even quite patronizing of the quaint religiosity of Joseph Smith and his strange people. Instead of screaming the charge that the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith are vile, crude and obviously blasphemous impositions or delusions, the newer, more kindly, less hostile, not to mention condescending, mode of explanation now sees Joseph Smith as a strange genius, a bold religious leader, perhaps as a rather typical "mystic," or even as an "Eastern mystic." The Book of Mormon has been described as a rather typical mystical text or as a youthful psychodrama manifesting the inner life of its author.³¹

Quinn blasted away at me without allowing his readers to know what my position really was. Hence the following bit of nonsense: he actually claimed that my "central criticism of Mormon historians is that their writings about Joseph Smith do not positively affirm to the

31. Midgley, "The Question of Faith and History," 53–54. I have subsequently learned much about revisionist accounts of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims. I have published a number of essays in which I have set out and criticized these explanations in considerable detail.

world their personal testimonies that he was God's prophet."³² I said nothing like this in the paper Quinn references, and I explicitly rejected such a notion in the long discussion that took place after I had presented my paper.³³

To this point, at least, I have never thought of responding to Quinn's distortion of my opinions. I could see no point in doing so. I have detected no need to confront his nonsense since anyone sufficiently interested could easily determine that he was confused. And I have not responded to the nonsense in Martin Hill's Mormon History Association presidential address,³⁴ where he tried to settle accounts with me without once coming close to stating my objections to his speculations about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon.

Hill claims that "only a few years ago Midgley asserted that 'the restoration is true—and only if—the Book of Mormon is authentic history. . . . These questions can be tested if not settled by the methods of the historian.'"³⁵ I actually wrote: "The restoration *message* is true *if—and only if—the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient history. And clearly* these questions can be tested, if not settled, by the methods of the historian" (emphasis added to indicate Hill's garbling).

32. Quinn, "On Being a Mormon Historian," 78.

33. After I had presented my paper, an interesting and instructive four-hour discussion took place in a hotel room during the evening of 15 October 1981. The following individuals took part in the discussion: Thomas G. Alexander, James B. Allen, Leonard J. Arrington, Davis Bitton, Elizabeth G. Dulany (an editor at the University of Illinois Press), Martin B. Hickman, Dean L. May, Larry C. Porter, Jan Shipp, and David J. Whittaker. Immediately after that conversation, I drafted an outline of what had taken place; on my return to Provo, I typed a ten-page, single-spaced copy. I was asked if I would "bear my testimony or introduce God in every account." My answer was, "No. I would not bear my testimony at the beginning of every essay. That would be stupid and unnecessary. But I would always strive to have my own deepest commitments before my eyes." Louis Midgley, "Notes on San Antonio Discussion," 6 (item 14). I then recommended Richard L. Bushman's insightful essay entitled "Faithful History," which can be consulted in *Faithful History*, 1–17. Quinn, "On Being a Mormon Historian," 105 n. 30, cites six pages of my essay ("The Question of Faith and History," 27–32), but nothing on those pages supports his notion of what constitutes my "central criticism."

34. Marvin S. Hill, "Positivism or Subjectivism? Some Reflections on a Mormon Historical Dilemma," *Journal of Mormon History* 20/1 (1994): 1–23.

35. Ibid., 14, misquoting Midgley, "Faith and History," 224.

Then Hill claims that "it seems reasonable to suppose that Midgley believed the tests *would* be conclusive; otherwise, there would be little point in conducting them."³⁶ Hill might think his surmise reasonable, but I do not. I simply do not think that any nontrivial question about the past can be settled with anything approaching the certitude of proof. What can be accomplished is to establish possibility and plausibility but not final certainty. Hill quotes me as saying that "I believe that [Martin] Marty is on the right track when he maintains that historians cannot prove that the Book of Mormon was translated from golden plates,"³⁷ but this is what I actually wrote:

I believe that Marty is on the right track when he maintains that historians cannot "prove that Smith was a prophet" and it is "improbable that they will prove him a fraud." "Similarly, historians cannot prove that the Book of Mormon was translated from golden plates and have not proven that it was simply a fiction of Joseph Smith."

With this garbled understanding of my position, Hill then claims that I have "lost confidence in these 'proofs,' perhaps as a result of more exposure to new sources and radical historical relativism. Midgley," Hill asserts, "has catapulted from being an absolutistic historical positivist to being an absolutistic historical subjectivist."³⁸ Sorry, but neither of these labels describes any position I have ever maintained. And Hill should have known better since I have dealt with this kind of confusion in an essay easily available to him.³⁹ To clinch his argument, Hill then refers to what he calls "a recent allegation" in which I claimed that "the mythology of historical objectivism [roughly Hill's 'positivism'] . . . is *fraudulent* and *corrupting* . . . for those who attempt to prove accounts of the Mormon past."⁴⁰ Hill

36. Hill, "Positivism or Subjectivism?" 14.

37. Ibid., again misquoting me, this time from Midgley, "The Acids of Modernity," 220 n. 32.

38. Hill, "Positivism or Subjectivism?" 15.

39. Louis Midgley, "Which Middle Ground?" *Dialogue* 22/2 (1989): 6-9.

40. Hill, "Positivism or Subjectivism?" 15 (emphasis supplied by Hill); this time Hill misquotes Louis Midgley, "The Myth of Objectivity: Some Lessons for Latter-day Saints," *Sunstone*, August 1990, 55.

inserted the word *prove* in place of my word *provide* and thereby gave the passage he quoted, with those curious ellipses, a radically different meaning. I was arguing that any effort to write (that is, produce) an account of the Mormon past from within the horizon provided by what Peter Novick has called the "myth of objectivity" is bound to get it wrong.⁴¹ Why? Because the myth of objectivity is fraudulent and corrupting. It is the uncritical acceptance of a version of this myth—the belief in historical objectivism—that has driven Hill and others to insist on fashioning naturalistic accounts of LDS truth claims, which claims they reject unless proof of their veracity has been provided.

What I have argued is that the Saints ought to listen to the prophetic messages found in the Book of Mormon in an effort to discover their truth and not insist that the veracity of that text be proven to the satisfaction of gentile skeptics. I believe such proof is an impossibility, if not a presumption, since here the Saints must live by faith and not by sight. Some, of course, insist that they might submit to the word of God if and only if it could be proven to their skeptical satisfaction to be true. They insist on proof before they will trust and act. But this is an illusion. I am confident that anyone who believes anything necessarily begins with a naive trust that may eventually yield something approaching an understanding or knowledge. But we simply do not begin with final proofs and then sort out our moral dilemmas and thereby get right with God.

My Interest in Fawn Brodie's Work

I admit that I was initially annoyed by remarks Davis Bitton made when he responded in 1981 to my first encounter with Mormon historians. But I changed my mind as I thought about the politics of entering into an arena in which I would most likely be pictured as an interloper and a threat. As I learned something about the norms that govern the interactions of Mormon historians, I also came to better understand the dynamics of writing about the Mormon past.

41. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). See Midgley's review of Novick's book in the *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 10 (1990): 102–4.

Some of Bitton's comments were right on the mark—I was obviously an outsider and had not paid my dues. I had only a preliminary and superficial knowledge of what Mormon historians had written and was unfamiliar with the history of Mormon historiography. Bitton's remarks sent me to library stacks and various archives. Needing to get a picture of what was being written about the Mormon past, I began with the period immediately following World War II. I wanted to know how we got to where we are now,⁴² and I needed some benchmarks to better assess the changes that have taken place.⁴³

My archival experience included, among other things, searching through the store of papers in Special Collections at University of Utah's Marriott Library. I learned much from those papers. I got a glimpse of the private worlds of Juanita Brooks,⁴⁴ Dale Morgan, Sterling M. McMurrin, Fawn Brodie, Dean Brimhall, and others. I have not directly incorporated most of what I learned from these archival materials into what I have published; rather, these forays have served as background material and have moderated my concerns about how the Mormon past is currently being viewed.

I have published one essay drawn from my archival experience—a detailed examination of the reception given to the various versions of

42. I also surveyed literature on the proper way to approach religious history and how Americans have written on church history or the history of religions.

43. At that time I started collecting the programmatic statements made by Mormon historians. For a time I worked with David J. Whittaker—one of the best of the Mormon bibliographers—on this project. I was stunned at the number and range of such statements. Davis Bitton and Leonard J. Arrington mention eight items that examine how historians should deal with the Mormon past. See *Mormons and Their Historians* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 185 n. 2. I have managed to collect over three hundred such items. All those with an urge to delve into such matters ought to familiarize themselves with *all* that has been written before going into print. To make this possible, I am currently preparing for publication an annotated bibliography in which I hope to include everything published from 1958 through 2000 on approaches to writing Mormon history.

44. I sat, for example, at the same table and examined the same files as did Levi S. Peterson, who was then working on what eventually became his *Juanita Brooks: Mormon Woman Historian* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988). This experience prepared me to offer a critical assessment of Peterson's wanton appropriation of Brooks for his own ideological purposes; see Louis Midgley, review of *Juanita Brooks*, by Levi S. Peterson, *BYU Studies* 29/4 (1989): 127–35.

Brodie's account of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon.⁴⁵ That essay parallels Gary Novak's revealing look at Dale Morgan, who was Brodie's early champion and mentor.⁴⁶ But, since control of the past yields power to maneuver people in the present, efforts have been made to resuscitate both Brodie and Morgan, as well as to turn Juanita Brooks into a dissident. However, the conversation over the Book of Mormon and the Mormon past has, I believe, moved relentlessly away from the speculation offered by both Morgan and Brodie in directions that neither of them preferred or could have predicted. It seems to me, for example, that Brodie's opinions on the Book of Mormon are no longer part of the current conversation, though her notion that she had somehow read the very newspapers and other materials from which Joseph Smith lifted ideas for the Book of Mormon forms at least part of the research agenda of some critics.

An Effort to Resuscitate Brodie

I am convinced that LDS writers who have their essays peddled, promoted, and praised by sectarian anti-Mormons have some explaining to do. At the least they have written badly, or they simply do not care what impact their essays have on building the kingdom. With this standard in mind, I was curious about e-mail rumors I received in New Zealand that someone entirely unknown to me was about to denounce me in *Dialogue* and also thereby to vindicate Fawn Brodie. When two different people sent me copies of the essay written by Glen J. Hettinger,⁴⁷ I could see no reason to respond. Others, however, have insisted that I respond. They have pointed to the mischief such an article can create. The scholarly community is not likely to be influenced by Hettinger's diatribe, but this is not the case with the less thoughtful. Anti-Mormons are anxious for whatever

45. See Midgley, "A Biographer and Her Legend," 147–230.

46. Gary F. Novak, "'The Most Convenient Form of Error': Dale Morgan on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon," *FARMS Review of Books* 8/1 (1996): 122–67.

47. Hettinger is "a graduate of Brigham Young University and Columbia University School of Law. He lives . . . in Rowlett, Texas, where he practices corporate and securities law." *Dialogue* 32/1 (1999): 198.

support they may be able to garner from disaffected church members. They make frequent polemical use of such materials in their crusade against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Hence the need for a response to Hettinger's essay.

It seems to me that even more than secular critics, sectarian anti-Mormons have a kind of reverence for Brodie's treatment of Joseph Smith that sometimes borders on idolatry. Some elements of the sectarian countercult movement tend to advance versions of what I have called the "Brodie legend." These people love to have someone who is a Latter-day Saint, at least in name, claim that Brodie has triumphed. For example, the Reverend John L. Smith, founder of what is now called UMI Ministries (previously Utah Missions Inc.), the oldest continuously operating anti-Mormon "ministry," recently claimed that Brodie has now been "vindicated."⁴⁸ What Reverend Smith forgot to identify for his mainly Baptist readers was exactly how and from what she needed vindication if her explanation has, as he claims, "stood for more than 50 years," and "only those whose case is weak continue to denounce it."⁴⁹

Thomas Jefferson

John L. Smith notes that "through the years, several students of Mormonism have tried to refute Brodie, among them, Louis Midgley . . . who . . . attempted to denigrate Brodie's work after she had written *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate Biography [History]* in 1975."⁵⁰ Even though Smith is not especially pleased to face the possibility that Thomas Jefferson did some of the things attributed to him by Brodie, he is willing to believe just about anything about Jefferson if

48. John L. Smith, "Fawn McKay Brodie Vindicated!!!" *The Inner Circle* 16/11 (November 1999): 10.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid. The subtitle of Brodie's biography of Jefferson is *An Intimate History*; the book was published by Norton in 1974. Reverend Smith, however, did not invent these mistakes. Instead, he borrowed them directly from Hettinger's attack on me in "A Hard Day for Professor Midgley," 92 n. 4, where the subtitle for Jefferson's biography of Jefferson is wrong. Hettinger may have taken the date from the paperback edition.

doing so can help to undermine Joseph Smith. So he has turned to Hettinger's essay for support.

Hettinger made a fuss because it now appears that Brodie may have guessed right about Jefferson having fathered one or more children by Sally Hemings (pp. 91–101). Hettinger claims that in 1998 DNA testing reduced "the possible logical universe of fathers for [Sally] Hemings's child Eston Hemings . . . to Thomas Jefferson, his brother Randolph Jefferson, Randolph Jefferson's five sons, and a slave child in the Jefferson line" (p. 91 n. 1).⁵¹ We must ask if this announcement that DNA tests have narrowed the possible fathers for Eston Hemings somehow shields Brodie's account of Joseph Smith from criticism. When the question is put this way, some links seem to be missing in Hettinger's apologia—his essay "for" Fawn Brodie. Hettinger began his essay by noting that the DNA testing was announced in 1998 during "a sex scandal in the White House, a sex scandal in which a president . . . flatly denied 'improper sexual relations,' believing, evidently, that no physical evidence could link him to the alleged deeds" (p. 91). It is not clear, though, what Bill Clinton's problems have to do with the issues Hettinger is attempting to address. The "evidence from the recent DNA tests," according to those who conducted those studies, shows that Thomas Jefferson could have been the father of Eston Hemings (p. 91). Though DNA evidence, for which I have a high regard, does not provide a final answer, other evidence, in my opinion, makes it likely that Thomas Jefferson was indeed the father.

On a more fundamental level than the DNA issue, Roger Launius claims that Brodie's *Thomas Jefferson* "set off a debate that incensed the established Jeffersonian scholars and several rebuttals were issued, any one of which were more able and effective than those about Joseph Smith prepared by Mormon historians."⁵² He has merely taken for granted that John C. Miller, Virginius Daubney, Dumas

51. Hettinger lists the 5 November 1998 and 7 January 1999 issues of *Nature* as his sources.

52. Roger D. Launius, "From Old to New Mormon History: Fawn Brodie and the Legacy of Scholarly Analysis of Mormonism," in *Reconsidering*, 229 n. 59.

Malone, and Steven H. Hockman had produced adequate responses to Brodie's treatment of Jefferson. Since Launius is not sympathetic to those critical of Brodie's approach to Joseph Smith, he brushes those criticisms aside while readily accepting the criticisms that historians have made of her approach to the stories about a liaison between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings. He expressed his opinion before Annette Gordon-Reed published her survey of the criticisms directed at Brodie's position on this issue.⁵³

Gordon-Reed found significant problems with the very literature that Launius claims was "more able" than the criticisms Latter-day Saints made of *No Man Knows*. I like Gordon-Reed's approach: she identifies the controlling biases within which Jefferson scholars have worked and examines how these have tended to distort textual evidence where it ran counter to their biases. And in her review of evidence concerning the claim that Thomas Jefferson was the father of children by Sally Hemings, she sets out some good reasons to conclude that a predisposition to see Jefferson in a heroic light has led some of the most qualified scholars to mishandle evidence. She has done a fine job of assessing the actual claims for and against the allegation that Jefferson had a long liaison with Sally Hemings that may have produced a number of children. I am not convinced that she is right in her assessment of the evidence, but I like her treatment of the way bias has played a role in determining how history is written.

Gordon-Reed argues for "a consistent standard for assessing evidence," which she claims has not been forthcoming in the treatment of Thomas Jefferson's relationship with Sally Hemings:

That consistency has been utterly lacking in the scholarly writing on this question, and that is cause for concern. It is possible, by examining the reactions to this story, to see the ways in which black people have been treated as lumps of clay to be fashioned and molded into whatever image the given historian feels is necessary in order to make his point.⁵⁴

53. Annette Gordon-Reed, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997).

54. *Ibid.*, xvii.

Gordon-Reed argues that this "is the real scandal of this whole story" about the way historians have dealt with the question of the paternity of the children of Sally Hemings. And she notes that "the ultimate truth or falsity of the Jefferson-Hemings story would not change [her] view of the way some scholars and commentators have mishandled their consideration of it and mistreated black people in the process."⁵⁵ I agree. And the irony is that we can substitute "Latter-day Saints" or a number of other despised groups for "black people" and make the same point. It is obvious that secularized commentators and scholars, as well as sectarian anti-Mormons, are regularly inconsistent in dealing with evidences; they also treat the Saints in essays critical of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon as mere "lumps of clay" that can be fashioned for whatever partisan purposes they may represent or hope to sell their wares to. From my perspective this problem explains why *No Man Knows* was initially received by literary gentlemen with such an outpouring of approval and why it has become a kind of icon—the Brodie legend, as I have called it—for sectarian anti-Mormons and cultural Mormon critics of the church.

Gordon-Reed looked into the way historians reacted to Brodie's treatment of the Jefferson-Hemings relationship:

Brodie brought together disparate pieces of information that she believed to support the conclusion that Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings had a thirty-eight-year relationship that produced six children. *Although there is no doubt that Brodie seriously overstated her case in a number of instances*, on balance she presented it well, providing details and raising issues that had never been considered fully.⁵⁶

But she pointed out that "Brodie also handed her detractors a club with which to beat her about the head and shoulders by also employing Freudian symbolism to support her claims."⁵⁷ Gordon-Reed is not inclined to defend Brodie's efforts to put Jefferson on the couch

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid., 4, emphasis added.

57. Ibid.

and pry from this or that language deep and previously hidden secrets. And her book is not really about Brodie but about the way some prominent historians have dealt in inconsistent and self-serving ways with evidences that have long been available.

Gordon-Reed also notes that the public has been eager to believe the story of an intimate relationship between Jefferson and Sally Hemings. Bringham confirms that Brodie's opinions on Jefferson appealed to the prurient interest of the general reading public. And this proclivity deeply troubled the Jefferson scholars and other historians because they believed that it would yield a distorted picture of Jefferson, whatever the truth about the Hemings matter turned out to be.

Hence the following comment by Gordon-Reed:

Though flawed, [Dumas] Malone's discussion of some of the circumstances in Jefferson's life that might have encouraged people to believe that Madison Hemings was [Thomas Jefferson's] son remains one of the more thoughtful treatments of the issue. His efforts did not settle the matter, and the combination of Fawn Brodie's book and an extremely popular fictional treatment of the alleged Jefferson-Hemings affair gave the story added credibility among the public. In the face of this, some Jefferson biographers decided to depart from Malone's more genteel approach.⁵⁸

Later Gordon-Reed notes the appearance of a novel in 1979 by Barbara Chase-Riboud entitled *Sally Hemings*, which "sold over a million and a half copies . . . during the 1980s and was re-released in 1994"; this book probably "had a more profound effect upon the popular view of this story than Fawn Brodie's biography. The debate between Brodie and her critics was conducted scholar to scholar," while the novel was consumed in an arena in which scholars had virtually no say.⁵⁹

58. Ibid., 48.

59. Ibid., 181.

Among other things, Gordon-Reed argues that historians who represent a powerful group, even when they are responsible and gifted, often end up blind to certain possibilities and are also quite willing to stereotype and dehumanize those viewed as unpopular, such as certain target groups, including blacks (and, I believe, Latter-day Saints). She shows, for example, that historians brushed aside the oral history and other accounts of the Hemings portion of the Jefferson family, which were substantially accurate, if these seemed to get in the way of their heroic view of Jefferson, even as they accepted the much less reliable tales told by the white side of that family, when doing so suited their purposes.⁶⁰ If we shift the topic a bit, she has sketched an explanation for why otherwise competent historians can build a case against Joseph Smith despite the abundance of competing evidence that undercuts their accounts and why they tend to accept obviously flawed tales while brushing aside the competing accounts preserved by the Saints. Gordon-Reed's assessment of the way the ideology of a dominant group ignored, rationalized, and otherwise dismissed apparently significant evidence in the case of Jefferson and Hemings reminds me of the way this same thing is constantly manifested by critics dealing with the Church of Jesus Christ, including Fawn Brodie. Gordon-Reed has much to say about the way the appetite of a consuming public and the accommodating efforts of the fiction writer, popularizer, and historian-critic-journalist (if these can be clearly separated) push aside the less spectacular, more complex, and subtle conversation going on among scholars debating controversial issues.

Hettinger claims that I argued that Brodie was wrong about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon because I once maintained that she was wrong about who fathered one or more of the children of Sally Hemings. In 1979, when I first encountered Brodie's treatment of Jefferson, I was inclined to accept the stance taken by those who I believed knew the relevant literature much better than Brodie.⁶¹

60. See *ibid.*, 97–98.

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

Hence, I assumed that she was probably wrong in her surmise and that the Jefferson experts were probably right in at least doubting her claims and questioning some of her reasoning. I also noticed that a number of historians, though agreeing with Brodie on the question of the paternity of the children of Sally Hemings, still thought she had made too much out of the Hemings affair, while clearly neglecting whole aspects of Jefferson's career. I did not, as Hettinger assumes, make the validity of her claims about Joseph Smith somehow dependent on whether she was right or wrong about Jefferson and Hemings. In order to advance his argument, Hettinger ignores the bulk of what I included in my 1996 essay and distorts what I had argued in my 1979 essay.

Hettinger claims that in 1979 I strung "together quotations from the pantheon of Jefferson historians" (p. 93). Not so. I was quite unaware of any comments by Merrill Peterson, Julian Boyd, and Dumas Malone (the three major Jefferson scholars) on Brodie's book. Some of those I quoted, however, were prominent figures in the American history profession. Hettinger quaintly describes the language I quoted from various historians as "usually [*sic*] remarkable for their sarcasm or overwrought rhetoric" (p. 93). I am, however, not responsible for the language used by those who reviewed Brodie's biography of Jefferson. When I offered a summary of their assessments, should I not have quoted what they actually wrote? How else could I have shown how Brodie's account of Jefferson was received by historians other than by quoting and paraphrasing them? Is it, perhaps, the mere fact that scholars have not always thought highly of Brodie that troubles Hettinger? I also pointed out that some of the more favorable reviews of *Thomas Jefferson* were unsigned or were written by people not qualified to assess her book or by those driven by what Hettinger himself labels "crass commercial concerns" (p. 94). Was I wrong, I wonder, in doing this? If so, why?

Hettinger believes that "the reopening of the Jefferson debate . . . has important implications for Brodie's work on Joseph Smith and for the community of LDS scholars" (p. 92). What are these implications? In his words, he claims that I have argued that Brodie

had been given a pass by the larger American academic community because her target was Joseph Smith. The narrow parochialism of establishment scholars blinded them to the truth, according to Midgley, that Brodie was a bad historian who concealed her hidden agendas behind clever rhetoric and assumptions that did violence to the real Joseph Smith. (p. 92)

Much of this is sheer nonsense. I have never thought that Brodie's "agendas" were hidden. Brodie's naturalistic bias is obvious. No one who encounters *No Man Knows*, whether discovering in it a coherent account of Joseph Smith or not, would miss her agenda. Furthermore, I said nothing about "the larger American academic community." I doubt that most academics, even if we have in mind only historians, have ever given Brodie, or Joseph Smith for that matter, any serious attention. Instead, twenty years ago I assumed that gentile historians had been entirely enthusiastic about Brodie's biography of Joseph Smith. But if we can judge such matters from the published reviews, I was wrong—they tended to be less than enthusiastic.⁶²

I have said nothing about any "narrow parochialism of establishment scholars." This is Hettinger's florid language. However, he is correct when he claims that I believe that Brodie's "clever rhetoric and assumptions" end up doing "violence to the real Joseph Smith." What Hettinger seems to argue (or imply) is that DNA evidence about the paternity of one of Sally Hemings's children somehow "vindicates" Brodie's explanation of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. If this is his position, he is not clear on why this conclusion necessarily follows from his premise. And if this is not his claim, then virtually his entire essay turns out to be little more than a diatribe interspersed with insults and misrepresentations.

In dealing with my 1996 essay on Brodie,⁶³ Hettinger claims that I again made "the Hemings affair the centerpiece of [my] attack on Brodie" (p. 95). But the fact is that in my eighty-four-page essay, just

62. See the discussion in this issue in "The Legend and Legacy of Fawn Brodie," pp. 41–42.

63. Midgley, "A Biographer and Her Legend," 147–230.

twelve pages are devoted in any way to Brodie's biography of Jefferson. Little of what I wrote in those twelve pages addresses the Hemings issue. I do not, as he alleges, focus on Brodie's assertions about Hemings and neither do most of the reviews I quoted or paraphrased. More than seventy pages of my 1996 essay were devoted to an examination of the original and subsequent conversation on *No Man Knows*. Hettinger neglects to mention this. Why? Because it gets in the way of his thesis? In an effort to build a case against me, he exaggerates, distorts, and then misreads what I have written. He wrongly claims that I have "made Brodie's method in [*Thomas*] *Jefferson* a test case for her treatment of Joseph Smith" (p. 99). I did nothing of the kind. Instead, I focused on her background assumptions, methods, and biases, and on her way of fashioning historical accounts. Hettinger does not sense the difference between Brodie's way of doing history and the limited issue of the possible accuracy of one of her guesses. Hence it is not obvious that a seeming vindication of one of her guesses, if this is what the DNA study has done, could validate Brodie's way of supporting her intuitions about Joseph Smith and her explanation of the Book of Mormon.

Oh, Those Nasty "Establishments"

Hettinger also thinks that I am somehow guilty of wandering back and forth and hence of switching sides in academic disputes. I have, of course, learned things and changed my mind, but not in the way he suggests. He claims that I started out being critical of what he calls "establishments"—this word appears fourteen times in his essay, often with shifting and equivocating reference. He then charges me with defending two of these presumably sinister things. According to Hettinger, I once went after some presumed academic establishment when I was working on my doctorate. He has in mind my criticisms of some ideas associated with the theology of Paul Tillich (1888–1965). Tillich, then a controversial Protestant theologian, had many critics. Be that as it may, I was interested in figuring out Tillich's views on various issues and not in confronting some "establishment" that he represented. It was merely a coincidence that Stephen Crary, who read my dissertation, had a different and rather idiosyncratic understanding of Tillich's

theology and also had a strong aversion to the Church of Jesus Christ and supported his bias by pointing to Brodie's book.

Crary, chair of religious studies at Brown University in the late sixties, had been assigned to read my dissertation. I was, it turned out, faced with a vexatious fellow. Up until then, I believe, he had never approved a doctoral dissertation. Each time he refused to sign one, control had been taken away from him. Someone outside of Brown was asked to act as a referee, and he was routinely overruled. Crary was troubled when he discovered that I had published an essay on Tillich in an academic journal before I had begun my dissertation.⁶⁴ He did not believe that I could write a dissertation in less than a year, since it had taken him something like seven years to finish his at Yale University. He expected me to take at least as long. When I presented him with my dissertation, he took a year to read it. The others on my committee thought this behavior was outrageous, and eventually he was ordered to appear at my dissertation defense. We were all stunned when he had no objections to what I had written, even though he granted that he read Tillich differently than I did.

Hettinger, referring to my brief remarks introducing my 1979 essay on Brodie, tells of my initial encounter with Crary. He does this in ways that make that episode almost unrecognizable to me. And he ends his skewed remarks with a conclusion I would not draw, one which is improper to infer (see pp. 92–93).

But this is not the only nonsense that Hettinger has directed at me. He accuses me of going after the "citadel of east-coast religious thought" (p. 92), presumably a powerful establishment. Then he shifts and accuses me of attacking an establishment of American historians who loved Brodie's treatment of Joseph Smith. He also accuses me of having joined what he, in Brodie's political language, calls "the Jeffersonian establishment"; finally, he claims I joined another evil establishment by defending the faith of Latter-day Saints (p. 95). However, all this talk about evil "establishments" is argument by slogan, which is merely arbitrary labeling and hence propaganda.

64. See Louis Midgley, "Paul Tillich's New Science of Values," *Western Political Quarterly* 15/2 (June 1962): 235–53.

“Opportunistic Side Switching”?

Hettinger claims that what he describes as “opportunistic side switching is not uncommon in the world and not surprising” (p. 99). Hence the following:

Professor Midgley, along with other LDS scholars, has made his own career with a stout defense of traditional orthodox teaching about Joseph Smith. Midgley, Nibley, and other Brodie detractors have been pillars of *the Mormon establishment*, revered as defenders of the faith in Priesthood Quorums and Sunday Schools, at Church Education Weeks, and Know Your Religion Series. (p. 99, emphasis added)

So Hettinger’s demonology recognizes a “Mormon establishment” dedicated to defending “traditional orthodox teachings.” I am pictured as a major player in this evil thing. The reader, of course, can determine for himself or herself how significant I am in this regard. (I am flattered to be placed next to Hugh Nibley.) The assumption behind Hettinger’s diatribe is that what he calls the “Mormon establishment” is evil, or at least that those who defend the faith (the “traditional orthodox teachings about Joseph Smith”) are wrong, and Brodie was right. This seems to be Hettinger’s point since he titled his piece “An Essay for Fawn Brodie.” Hettinger’s allegations are not supported by evidence or analysis—they are just bald assertions. I wonder why Hettinger seems to believe that defending the faith is wrong in principle. If so, is it wrong because it is the work of an “establishment”? If this is his argument, then what he claims is absurd.

Hettinger has a corollary. He pictures Brodie as always opposed to “powerful men with vested interests” (p. 99). Are we to believe that she was always consistently anti-establishment, as Hettinger understands that label, and for that reason always right? He seems to hold that she fought the good fight against the faith of the Saints and was always dedicated to truth, and that the Saints should now be celebrating her accomplishment.

Need We Again Examine *No Man Knows*?

In what he calls "fairness and loyalty to truth," Hettinger urges his readers to "assess *No Man Knows My History* again in light of her vindication" (p. 101) on the Hemings issue. But he offers no evidence to support her treatment of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. He does not appear to have given the literature on Brodie careful attention. Instead, he seems to maintain that the believers are wrong because they have been misled by an "establishment" bent on defending the faith. "Historical truth," he claims, "now includes the fact that much of the documentation in *No Man Knows My History*, once so angrily denounced, has been vindicated and must now be acknowledged or even incorporated by faithful LDS historians" (p. 101).⁶⁵ So it appears that Brodie did not have to be vindicated. Like the Reverend John L. Smith, Hettinger believes that she was right all along. Like Smith, Hettinger offers no supporting arguments; he merely opines. I can see no reason to accept his opinion on these matters.

What Outrage?

Hettinger wrongly claims that *No Man Knows* has been "well received generally by critics and scholars," while it has "provoked outrage in the Mormon community" (p. 91). Elsewhere I have demonstrated that this claim is questionable or at least an exaggeration. Hettinger thinks I owe Brodie an apology. But he also feels that an apology would not be sufficient for what he describes as "decades of venomous personal invective" (p. 100). By me? For decades? This is absurd. Hettinger also opines about what he calls "an important lesson for all of us who care about historical events and personalities, about methodology and premises and 'the open and honest pursuit of truth'" (pp. 100–101). So he wants "us" to

65. It is unclear what Hettinger means by documentation. It is likewise unclear how documentation, however understood, can be vindicated. Perhaps Hettinger has in mind something like "interpretation" or "explanation" when he refers to "documentation."

reconsider the way in which we conduct our discussions and disagreements and retaliations. A bludgeoning is a bludgeoning, even if the rage that drives it is outrage, even if the outrage is justified or motivated by deeply held beliefs. Apologies do not follow bloodbaths, nor would they help much. How could he admit? And how could she forgive? (p. 101)

What bloodbath, what rage, what outrage, what bludgeoning? I assume that "he" and "she" refer to me and Brodie. I am not clear why I should apologize to Brodie, even if that were possible, just because DNA testing (supported by other evidence Hettinger does not address) seems to support Brodie's hunches on one issue quite unrelated to Joseph Smith. Is it warranted to ignore or brush aside the criticisms of Brodie's account of Joseph Smith, as Hettinger has done, by claiming that criticisms of her approach are expressions of "rage" or "outrage," describing them as "brutal," leading to "bloodbaths," a "bludgeoning," or a personal "attack"? Such promiscuous language distorts what has actually been a mildly interesting, rather moderate, and in some respects even fruitful scholarly conversation. As I have shown elsewhere,⁶⁶ professional historians—as distinguished from literary critics, Brodie's close associates, or ideologues—have had mixed reactions to *No Man Knows*. Moreover, non-Latter-day Saint criticisms have been as strongly worded as those written by church members.

When Brodie's biography of Thomas Jefferson appeared, some historians complained that Brodie had mistakenly taken up some charges first circulated by James Callender in 1802 about a sexual relationship between Jefferson and Sally Hemings. But they also found other objections to her book. For example, one reviewer complained that Brodie's

Jefferson is not the author of the Constitution of Virginia (three-quarters of a page) or of the Declaration of Independence (two pages), the Secretary of State (scattered refer-

66. Midgley, "A Biographer and Her Legend," 190–97.

ences), the architect of the Louisiana Purchase (one paragraph) or even (his own proudest boast) the author of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (one line).⁶⁷

It is not exactly clear how DNA tests could possibly overcome these and other similar deficiencies.

Other reviewers lodged various complaints against Brodie's account of Jefferson. Some, including an editor at Norton, pointed out that her book was riddled with mistakes, both large and small. Latter-day Saints had already found the same problem with her book on Joseph Smith. Additionally, Brodie's biographer drew attention to the messy manuscripts that she submitted to her publishers.⁶⁸ They were so marred with mistakes that even expert editorial assistance could not eradicate all of them. Furthermore, she tended to resist correction from her editors and critics.

Failure to Follow an Argument

In 1979 some of the objections to Brodie's *Thomas Jefferson* seemed similar to the kinds of objections the Saints had made to *No Man Knows*. Hence it seemed appropriate to suggest that those historians who had noticed problems in her account of Jefferson might want to be cautious when approaching her treatment of Joseph Smith. It appears that Hettinger has not been able to follow my argument, or he may feel that he can reverse it by claiming that her "vindication" on the Hemings affair, if that is what it is, should send Mormon historians back for still another look at her treatment of Joseph Smith. If this is what Hettinger is trying to suggest, then I have no objections except to his rhetorical overkill.

I think, though, that Hettinger has more than this in mind, when he claims I made "the Hemings affair the centerpiece of [an] attack on Brodie" (p. 95). Not so. I mentioned that some of her critics had

67. Unsigned review of Brodie's *Thomas Jefferson*, in the *Economist* 255 (24 May 1975): 104.

68. See Newell G. Bringham, *Fawn McKay Brodie: A Biographer's Life* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 211–12.

faulted her efforts to support, with questionable psychological speculation, her hunches about Hemings. And I did this only to clarify Brodie's own declaration that some "reviewers had been very kind" to indicate that she had "humanized Jefferson in a way no other biographer had" by revealing the "major secrets in his life, which he had helped to hide and which his biographers also helped to hide."⁶⁹ Brodie boasted that she had discovered these secrets by the use of "insights" she borrowed from psychoanalytic literature. I remain skeptical of her command and use of categories borrowed from psychological and psychoanalytic literature.

In an effort to clarify the point Brodie was attempting to make, I made the following remark:

Those supposed secrets involved, among other things, fathering illegitimate children with a young quadroon [one-quarter Black] slave girl who accompanied him and his daughter to Paris. Thus she devotes five [or more] chapters and an appendix to the old tale about Jefferson's supposed "affair" with Sally Hemings.⁷⁰

Obviously, when I wrote those words, I did not believe that the tales about Jefferson's alleged affair with Sally Hemings were true. I have subsequently moderated my opinion on this issue.

I then offered a brief and general survey of the treatment given by reviewers to Brodie's *Thomas Jefferson*. The crucial question was not whether Jefferson fathered one or more children with Hemings but how Brodie reached and supported her conclusions. Her disproportionate attention to this Hemings issue and the way her focus on the issue figures in her overall effort to understand Jefferson, his times, and his significance are disquieting.⁷¹

Hettinger has simply not understood the significance of the debate over Brodie's biography of Jefferson. Nor has he figured out

69. Judy Hallet interview with Brodie, in the Papers of Fawn McKay Brodie (1915–1981), tape 1, box 1, folder 5, Manuscripts Division, University of Utah Marriott Library, Salt Lake City, Utah, as quoted in Midgley, "A Biographer and Her Legend," 161.

70. Midgley, "A Biographer and Her Legend," 161.

71. See *ibid.*, 161–71.

what I make of the various criticisms of Brodie's work. He wrongly thinks I centered my attention on her claims about Jefferson and Hemings. I did not. My concern has been with her method of writing history—what she saw as evidence, how she handled her sources, and how she manipulated evidence and structured arguments—and not, as Hettinger imagines, on any particular substantive claim. One can guess correctly and do so for wrong or insufficient reasons. I am thus not interested in whether some of her conclusions have turned out to be right, although I am interested in how she reached and supported those conclusions. Since what now appears to be solid evidence has turned up suggesting that Jefferson fathered one or more children with Hemings, I have no problem accepting this opinion.

The Bravado and the Exaggeration

Hettinger exaggerates when he claims that Brodie has been "vindicated" merely because she seems to have guessed right about one narrow factual issue. He has not addressed the question of how that fortuitous guess could possibly vindicate her way of using "insights" from psychoanalytic literature or her own "intuitions" about what may or may not have been going on. I have a high regard for DNA tests. I am, however, not convinced that such evidence has undercut criticisms of crucial aspects of Brodie's way of arriving at conclusions. Her critics have been skeptical, for example, of the way she teased proof out of Jefferson's intimacy with his daughter's young companion in Paris by studying the words he used to describe soils in Europe. How could DNA evidence vindicate Brodie's hunch that Jefferson's dark secret was hidden in a word he used to describe the color of some soils he had observed in his travels? Whatever one may think about the Hemings matter, elements of Brodie's speculation remain problematic.

Why then the "Hard Day for Professor Midgley"? Apparently because Hettinger feels that

At the moment Fawn McKay Brodie, imperfect historian, has emerged from her battle with Louis Midgley and the Jefferson elite ahead on points in an ugly struggle. She

has been badly bruised, but emerges in the lead because she dared tenaciously to follow her own stubborn insight. The altercation has been brutal and is not over. Her conflict with those who have vested interests in preserving one view of Joseph Smith will be tougher still, perhaps hopeless, because like Midgley, they have taken up positions immune, finally, to rational challenge. (p. 100)

This is, for the most part, like much of what Hettinger has directed at me: melodramatic nonsense. I am, however, inclined to agree with him that Brodie might have been in thrall to "her own stubborn insight" on various issues. I do not see the conversation over the quality of Brodie's biographies as especially brutal or ugly. In my estimation, the discussion over *No Man Knows* has remained within the bounds of scholarly comity. And Hettinger should sense, being an attorney, that in every contest there will be what he calls "vested interests." His own interest in defending Brodie from criticism, especially given the passion with which he denounces me, seems vested.

Does Hettinger feel that he has now shown the proper civility and hence the way to conduct scholarly discussions? Does he not see that his language could be turned back at him? Should we now begin to imitate his style, rhetoric, tone or mode of argument, or manner of reading what others have written? What Hettinger does is pass on some recent news about DNA testing that possibly links Thomas Jefferson to Eston Hemings. Exactly what this has to do with Joseph Smith remains a mystery.

Hettinger wrongly claims that Brodie's *Thomas Jefferson*

came almost universally under attack for its scholarship and methodology, but most especially for its central assertion that Thomas Jefferson had, in fact, had a long sexual relationship with Sally Hemings and, moreover, had fathered one or more of her children. The swift establishment response pronounced Brodie's book both reckless and wrong. (pp. 91–92)

Reviewers expressed a number of complaints about Brodie's scholarship and methodology, often questioning her efforts to employ cate-

gories borrowed from psychoanalytic literature to figures and events in the past, but there was nothing like a universal condemnation. Hettinger's statement is filled with exaggeration and other mistakes.

In 1996, I reported the results of my having surveyed 154 reviews of Brodie's *Thomas Jefferson*. I consulted the reviews that Brodie and her publisher had assembled and that she had preserved in her own papers. I found that 74 of these reviews appear to be very favorable and 80 are in one degree or another unfavorable. Hettinger wrongly maintains that reviewers nearly universally condemned Brodie's Jefferson biography.⁷² In addition, I noted that a number of those reviewers who were favorably disposed to Brodie were historians, some of them sporting large reputations.⁷³ Hettinger thus exaggerates, for *Thomas Jefferson* did not come "almost universally under attack."

A Final Comment

Hettinger's "essay for Fawn Brodie" is an additional instance of efforts by critics of the kingdom to prop up the Brodie legend. Outside sectarian anti-Mormon circles, these efforts have been, in one degree or another, rather modest and somewhat cautious. In most instances they have not pictured Brodie as a faultless hero. Newell Bringhurst, Brodie's biographer, has not shied away from mentioning the less-than-heroic aspects of her personality and literary career even as he has struggled to paint a sympathetic portrait of someone with whom he deeply identifies. Hettinger, on the other hand, misses all the subtle nuances. For him, as for D. Michael Quinn, the entire discussion is reduced to Good Guys (and Gals) and Bad Guys. What Hettinger's essay demonstrates, among other things, is that one is likely to strike a raw nerve if one has the audacity to suggest that Brodie may have had feet of clay. It is puzzling why the editors of *Dialogue* would choose to publish Hettinger's obviously flawed and just plain nasty essay. Do they imagine an audience eager to feed on such stuff? Perhaps there is one. If so, this unpleasant fact tells us

72. See *ibid.*, 164–67.

73. See *ibid.*, 172.

something about what is going on with those on the margins of the Mormon academic community. But if the editors imagine such an audience, should not they at least have made sure that Hettinger's essay had the correct title for Brodie's biography of Jefferson?

Books and essays do not just write themselves; they are, rather, products of a time and place and hence are located in some political, professional, ideological, or polemical setting. It is, therefore, useful for readers to know something of what drives authors, what drew them to a topic and helped shape their prose. I have sketched the contours of the quarrels in which I have been involved to indicate exactly how and why I became interested in Brodie and how I came to fashion "A Biographer and Her Legend."

I have also indicated my dismay at discovering several writers who seek a literary peg on which to hang their unbelief or who have some ideological itch they need to scratch. Some are indignant, for example, about the "sins of traditional Mormon history," and some are in thrall to some vague, soft version of the myth of objectivity and thereby reduce the entire interesting discussion over the Mormon past to an ugly contest between open truth tellers like themselves and the corrupt "polemicists" whom they see as their critics.⁷⁴ I trust that I have revealed at least some self-deception in this curious portrayal of the current conversation over the foundations of the faith of Latter-day Saints.⁷⁵

74. For details, see Midgley, review of *New Mormon History*, 119–20.

75. The debate over the paternity of Sally Hemings's children has intensified since the publication of Annette Gordon-Reed's book and the subsequent report on DNA testing on the Jefferson line. Eugene Foster's DNA study, contrary to the lurid publicity, limited the possible fathers for Eston Hemings, Sally's last child, to over two dozen male Jeffersons. And the latest careful review of the evidence, with one judicious dissent, concluded that the most likely father of Eston was Randolph Jefferson, the younger brother of Thomas, or one of Randolph's sons. See the thirty-five page preliminary "Report: Scholars Commission on the Jefferson-Hemings Matter," issued on 12 April 2001. The full results of the work of the thirteen distinguished scholars who made up the "blue-ribbon commission" will soon be available.