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**Abstract** Review of *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (2007), by Terryl L. Givens.

# MORMON CULTURE: A WORLDVIEW

Cherry B. Silver

Review of Terryl L. Givens. *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. xvii + 414 pp., with index. \$29.95.

Terryl L. Givens has written a provocative book. His study is richly textured, full of allusions and comparisons, ideologically penetrating, colorful, and filled with vitality. As in his earlier works, *The Viper on the Hearth* and *By the Hand of Mormon*,<sup>1</sup> Givens writes for an educated general audience about Mormon literary values, history, and beliefs. Readers interested in Mormon writers, artists, and thinkers should enjoy Givens's assessments. A background in the humanities will enable readers to savor Givens's ambitious placement of Mormon thought within high Western culture. And having an interest in theology enables one to follow his first four chapters on the peculiar, paradoxical teachings of Joseph Smith that lead to a distinctive worldview.

Givens presents us with a theoretical analysis of the Latter-day Saint faith and its paradoxes, appearing in part 1, "Foundations and Paradoxes in Mormon Cultural Origins." The other two parts of the book are entitled "Beginnings (1830–1890): The Dancing Puritans" and

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1. Terryl L. Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth: Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) and *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

“A Movable Zion (1890–Present): Pioneer Nostalgia and Beyond the American Religion.”

Chapters 5 and 11, however, comprise virtually a monograph in themselves and focus on the battles between liberal proponents and orthodox guardians of the life of the mind. A further subtext deals with five traditional categories of culture—architecture, music and dance, theater and film, literature, and visual arts. Givens explores these in two historical waves, representing the beginnings of Mormonism to 1890 and then 1890 to the present. Readers can pick their specialty or enjoy the composite collection.

### **Paradox**

Givens’s four paradoxes in Mormon thinking encompass authority/freedom, certainty/searching, sacred/temporal, and chosen/universal. Chapter by chapter Givens validates his underlying theory that Latter-day Saints wrestle with contradictions in their thinking and that these contradictions prompt complex cultural manifestations.

In chapter 1 Givens begins with the iron rod and the Liahona division within Latter-day Saint thinking:

The consequence of these two traditions of emphasis on freedom and authority is an ever-present tension in Mormon culture between submission to an ecclesiastical authoritarianism without parallel in modern Christianity and an emphasis on and veneration for the principle of individual moral agency. (p. 15)

For intellectuals and artists, the tension is especially stark. Intellectual inquiry and artistic exploration should thrive in a culture like the Mormon one, which opposes as evil any attempt “to deprive us of the slightest respect for free agency.” At the same time, LDS artists and intellectuals find themselves constrained by the church’s insistence that all inspiration is not equal, and they discover that the same prophetic prerogatives that impeded [Oliver] Cowdery’s exercise of

autonomy may cramp the style of maverick intellectuals and artists today. (p. 16)

The paradox explored by Givens in chapter 2 concerns the certainty of Latter-day Saints that their religion offers answers to eternal questions. At the same time they remain indeterminate or open in their belief systems. The confluence of certainty and searching may be either fruitful or just puzzling, he argues.

For many observers, the supreme confidence and amplitude of Mormon's pronouncements upon their own faith smack of spiritual arrogance and self-complacency. But these tendencies operate in tandem with a powerful countercurrent: salvation is for Mormons an endless project, not an event, and is therefore never complete, never fully attained, never a realized state or object of secure possession. (p. 28)

Like the contest between authoritarianism and independence, the uneasy coexistence of certainty and searching spurs vigorous debates in the Mormon intellectual community and provides fodder for artists who both explore and depict the cultural tensions that result. (p. 33)

Chapter 3 contrasts the preoccupation of Latter-day Saints with the practicality of temporal matters and their aspirations to the sacred and the eternal. As *New York Herald's* editor James Gordon Bennett depicted the paradox: "They are busy all the time establishing factories to make saints and crockery ware, also prophets and white paint" (cited on p. 37). Givens elaborates further on the relation of sacred space to bricks and mortar in Mormon kingdom building:

The paradox that results from these contrary tendencies is a culture that sacralizes and exalts the mundane even as it naturalizes and domesticates the sacred. That men and women may become Gods is taken literally enough by Mormons to affront the orthodox. And the reality of divine intrusions into the human sphere—of actual heavenly ministrants, celestial

epiphanies, miraculous artifacts, is not explained away as myth or metaphor, but brazenly celebrated. (p. 42)

In chapter 4 he explains that Latter-day Saints stand apart from other religions, being elite in their own eyes, a chosen lineage and a “peculiar people,” yet seeking truth wherever it is to be found and eager, through their family history searches, to tie all peoples together. Latter-day Saints now claim a global perspective, yet they have been tied to American culture for a century and a half. Paradoxes continue, Givens argues.

What aspects of Mormonism are themselves culturally particular rather than theologically essential? This is a question that pertains not just to matters of faith and practice, but to matters of cultural expression. Because art and intellect, like worship, can suffer from both embracing too much and embracing too little. In balancing covenantal obligations with life in Babylon, dangers lurk in both directions. Exclusivity can produce pride, self-righteousness, and spiritual sterility. But at the same time, to accept and esteem everything is to value nothing. (Only an auctioneer can equally appreciate all art, said Oscar Wilde.) (p. 61)

In Givens’s explorations of these four general paradoxes, the reader tastes the heart of his message. His skillful blending of theology and humanities leads Givens to situate Joseph Smith and the Mormons in the middle of centuries-old intellectual and cultural contests. He recounts, for example, theories of human possibilities as given by Jonathan Edwards, Dante, Milton, Goethe, and Byron, then turns to Joseph Smith’s illuminating vision that “a godly destiny is precisely what humans are called to pursue. . . . In so literally embracing the divine potential in man, Mormons ennoble human nature to such a degree that even the most exuberant Renaissance humanists would blanch” (pp. 41–42). This potential is not just intuitive but requires schooling too: “What is surprising, rather, is how quickly Joseph would nonetheless turn to incorporate the intellectual with the mystical, ancient learning with modern revelation, formal schooling with

heavenly authority, making of the new faith an amalgam that Harold Bloom has called ‘a purely American gnosis’” (p. 69).

With such emphasis on intellectual play, this text invites readers to discover their own interests mirrored in Givens’s work. For example, in the cover blurbs, historian Richard Bushman praises his rearrangement of historical perspectives. Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp finds connections “to broader impulses in Christian and American theology and aesthetics.” Sociologist Rodney Stark likes touring “the remarkable achievements of Mormon culture,” whose successes he has charted in his own studies.

### Intellectual history

Chapter 5 offers examples of Latter-day Saint intellectual aspirations in the early period. Givens ranges from the School of the Prophets in Kirtland to the University of Deseret in Utah Territory. He delves into the battles between the Godbeites with their Liberal Institute and the ambitious theological studies written by Parley and Orson Pratt (pp. 94–98).

In passing Givens pays tribute to the influence of the early Polysophical Society (1854–56) and the Wasatch Literary Association (1874–78), groups of Saints who fulfilled Joseph Smith’s ambitions for high culture in their desert home (pp. 92–93). For data on the latter he is indebted to Ronald Walker’s detailed study “Growing Up in Early Utah: The Wasatch Literary Association, 1874–1878.”<sup>2</sup> It is evident throughout that Givens builds on the studies of dozens of other researchers. His encyclopedic explanations come from his comprehensive readings of materials covering two centuries, both primary and secondary sources, which he skillfully weaves into an exciting narrative of challenge and resolution.

In chapter 11 Givens explores a series of twentieth-century cultural wars, primarily between the church establishment and independent thinkers. Whether Givens treats the black issue or feminism,

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2. Walker published the original article in *Sunstone*, November/December 1981, 44–51, and more recently in *Qualities That Count: Heber J. Grant as Businessman, Missionary, and Apostle* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2004), 61–80.

Book of Mormon authenticity or correlation, there is indeed much to be considered relating to twentieth-century Latter-day Saint life. His topics range from science and religion to church education, history and faith, the Mormon intellectual today, academic freedom, and Book of Mormon studies.

Givens begins by considering basic conflicts between religion and science, finding Latter-day Saint response to Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) rather moderate, yet

an inconsistent story, a mixture of both fundamentalism and radicalism, orthodox opinions and unexpected openness, as the case study of evolution illustrates. Traditional Christian belief regarding creation was rooted in three tenets: God created the earth out of nothingness (ex nihilo creation), the process lasted six literal days, and all of this transpired about 6,000 years ago. Mormonism did not align itself behind any of those three articles of faith. (p. 198)

Givens nicely introduces the work and ideas of James E. Talmage, John A. Widtsoe, and Joseph F. Merrill as scientist apostles who wrote both theology and technical books (pp. 199, 201). He also heralds B. H. Roberts as “far and away the most important Mormon historian of the era—and perhaps the most complete man of learning in church history” (p. 201), yet acknowledges Roberts’s failure to convince church leaders to support his major work, *The Truth, the Way, the Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology*, without changes relative to science, which Roberts refused to make.

The disputed passages were largely a consequence of the doctrinal speculations and conceptual bridges that he found necessary to achieve a perfect synthesis of the LDS scriptural corpus with the science—especially paleontology—of his day. . . . But more controversially for Latter-day Saints, he cited Lord Kelvin’s theory of extraterrestrial origins of life as compatible with his view that Adam and Eve were translated beings brought here from another sphere (thereby preserving



the scientific validity of evolution while exempting the human family). (pp. 203–4)

Contemporary readers will probably feel relieved that church leaders resisted endorsing such claims. However, Givens points out the loss of exploratory energy when conservative writers and teachers replaced this professional cadre. Particularly he notes “the influence of an ultra conservative CES [Church Educational System]” where “it became increasingly rare to call men with scholarly backgrounds to leadership positions” (p. 207). Following the lead of researcher Armand Mauss, he cites the mid-century domination of President J. Reuben Clark, “a staunch conservative and defender of orthodoxy” (p. 206). Giving an insider view of competitive ideas within the church administration and its educational system, Givens depicts tensions in uncompromising language: “The strains of reconciling Zion and the world, spirit and matter, the sacred and the mundane, had proven too much” (p. 209). Here appears what to me looks like a key point in his argument. Paradox may be fruitful or disastrous as the pendulum swings from one force to another.

Givens continues to explore tensions resulting from the paradox between authority and freedom of thought:

If science was the bugbear that challenged the limits of Joseph Smith’s intellectual utopianism and ecumenicism in the second era of the church’s existence, history was the fiery furnace of Mormonism’s most recent generations. (p. 211)

Under Book of Mormon studies, he introduces mid-twentieth-century anthropologist M. Wells Jakeman, who brought a new dimension to Brigham Young University research. Givens acknowledges the solid contributions made in Mesoamerican studies by John L. Sorenson, the erudition of Hugh Nibley, and the significant research published by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) (pp. 220, 228–30).

As Givens summarizes the unfolding drama, two forces caused tightening of church controls over historical writing—suspicion of intellectuals and the spectacular growth in membership globally

(p. 231). Givens is obviously well-informed and fair-minded but determined not to soft-pedal the emotional intensity of differences. For instance, in the concern for how to write the Mormon story, he depicts the importance to both the institution and its thinkers:

LDS doctrine as a whole is rooted inescapably in history; its claims to divine authority and restored truth are entirely dependent on the narratives of LDS origins. . . . What this means in practice is that challenges to orthodox accounts of the church's past strike at the very heart of the faith. . . .

. . . Some portray the battle over Mormon history as between efforts at honest, full disclosure and paranoid, statist control of information. Others see it as a conflict between faith-inspired scholarship and a secular mania for debunking and humanizing the sacred. . . .

When intellectuals demand a less sanitized version of Mormon history, they are generally insisting on greater scrutiny into the details and cultural contexts surrounding certain key moments and pivotal events in the church's first seventy-five years. (pp. 222–23)

Givens mentions the Mountain Meadows Massacre as one of those pivotal events and focuses on Juanita Brooks's significant 1950 book (pp. 211–12).<sup>3</sup> Curiously, he does not describe the current monumental study by church scholars Ronald Walker, Richard Turley, and Glen Leonard that will open church sources and authentically document the tragedy,<sup>4</sup> but, in a footnote, does mention Will Bagley, the terrier nipping at their heels with his accusatory account (p. 382 n. 119).<sup>5</sup>

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3. Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950).

4. Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley, and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) has appeared since the publication of Givens's *People of Paradox*, but knowledge about this project has been widespread for years.

5. Givens points out that Will Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002), was rebutted by Robert D. Crockett, "A Trial Lawyer Reviews Will Bagley's *Blood of the Prophets*," *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 199–254.

Givens welcomes present “signs that the Mormon leadership believes they have weathered the worst of the storms, and are confident that even full disclosure cannot, ultimately, damage the foundations of Mormon belief” (p. 239). This decade the church published seventy-four DVDs for public use, representing 400,000 images from its historical archives of basic research documents. The Book of Mormon critical text project began publication in 2001, including “an analytical transcription of the printer’s copies and extant original Book of Mormon manuscript, a comprehensive history of textual changes, and an analysis of every textual variant” (p. 239).<sup>6</sup> Presently the Joseph Smith Papers are being prepared for publication, anticipating “two dozen volumes comprising all contemporary documents relating to his life” (p. 239).

Concluding this aspect of his study, Givens returns to the paradox of certainty, contrasting sure knowledge like that of the brother of Jared in beholding the finger of Christ with present-day uncertainty as “an inescapable condition of the adult human condition” (p. 239). His own stance is quite clear, judging by his sources and by the intensity of his description, that opening church sources to a broad range of interpretations will only benefit the Mormon community. And his audience obviously must join in applauding an intellectual openness or take offense at his line of reasoning.

### Aspects of Mormon Culture

Looking at *People of Paradox* for its insights into the history of Mormon culture, readers can enjoy the treatment of artists and artifacts that Givens generously offers in two broad swaths, from beginnings to 1890 and thereafter through the twentieth century.

Under the theme of architecture in chapter 6, Givens necessarily treats the Kirtland, the Nauvoo, and the Brigham Young–inspired temples—St. George, Manti, Logan, and Salt Lake—plus the Tabernacle on Temple Square and gives a passing look at ward meetinghouses. In temples Givens sees “an architecture that reflects the sacred-temporal

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6. Royal Skousen has been the prime mover for this monumental project.

polarity that Mormonism has always collapsed” and in meetinghouses “a stark minimalism” (pp. 113, 114). Larger tabernacles, he believes, created “a middle ground between Puritan austerity and Catholic ornateness.” The golden age of early architecture after the Manifesto of 1890 resulted in “wonderfully diverse and aesthetically indulgent examples” of ward chapels. No longer preaching the gathering, “Mormons,” he argues, “would have to limit their physical imprint to their sacred edifices, rather than entire communities” (p. 115).

Second-generation Mormon culture begins with chapter 11 on recent church architecture. As might be expected, the author applauds individuality in design. He follows Paul Anderson’s careful analysis of meetinghouses and temples to express appreciation for the movement away from fortresses, epitomized in the granite spires on the Salt Lake Temple, to buildings that blended with the environment like the Polynesian temple in Laie, Hawaii, or its prairie counterpart in Cardston, Alberta, Canada (p. 247). Building booms have led to functional, standardized plans for both chapels and temples. Returning to his theme, Givens emphasizes the mundane mingling with the sacred, “the jarring juxtaposition of cinderblock meetinghouses with gymnasiums, on the one hand, and ethereal temples on the other” (p. 250).

Situating Latter-day Saint music in the American Protestant tradition in chapter 7, Givens reviews selections in the Emma Smith hymnal, many coming from the Methodist tradition and over a third of Latter-day Saint authorship, expressing their distinctive faith that they were the new Israel. Although the University of Nauvoo launched a music department, more memorable was the reputation of William Pitt’s Nauvoo Brass Band. Music led to dancing, despite Puritan concerns. “Mormonism could have gone the route of more-fundamentalist faiths, banning an activity with clear tendencies toward worldliness. Instead the church opted to embrace dancing, institutionalize it, and thereby turn it into an instrument of socialization and harmless amusement” (p. 135). He also traces the beginnings of the Tabernacle Choir from early singing schools. Hymn writing accompanied the Saints’ migration west. Both the band and the choir advanced in their new home.

The Tabernacle Choir symbolized “Mormonism’s entry into a new era of public respectability” with its performance at the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago (p. 253). In chapter 13 the author describes tours and recordings leading to a weekly national radio broadcast in 1929. He also includes the points of tension Michael Hicks sees: “the will to progress versus the will to conserve, the need to borrow from outsiders versus the need for self-reliance, and the love of the aesthetic versus the love of utility” (cited on p. 255).<sup>7</sup> After he analyzes the contributions of choir directors Evan Stephens, Richard P. Condie, and J. Spencer Cornwall, it is surprising that Givens does not give his opinion on the work of Jerold Ottley and Craig Jessop, well within the scope of his study. With composers, likewise, he discusses B. Cecil Gates and Leroy Robertson, particularly Robertson’s *Oratorio from the Book of Mormon*. He names as successor to that oratorio Merrill Bradshaw’s oratorio *The Restoration*. However, he includes neither Crawford Gates’s serious religious music (except *Symphony No. 2* for the Hill Cumorah Pageant, p. 268) nor Robert Cundick’s *The Redeemer*.

Instead he turns to the genre of pop musical with comments on Doug Stewart and Lex de Azevedo’s *Saturday’s Warrior* (1974), seen by over 1.5 million people but criticized for “its trivialization of missionary work and sacred doctrines” as well as for “slick sophistication, misleading if not heretical theology, and stereotyping toward bigotry, quoting Eugene England” (p. 260).<sup>8</sup> Along with this he describes pop bands parodied in film by *Sons of Provo*, Latter-day Saint comic films like *The RM* and *Singles Ward*, and Gladys Knight’s Saints Unified Voices as examples of “the challenge of multiculturalism” (p. 262) and “a culture that does not sufficiently discriminate between the sublime and the banal, the profoundly Christian and the (merely) culturally Mormon” (p. 260).

Chapter 8 on theater helps define the proactive Mormon outlook toward drama, as Social Hall and the Salt Lake Theatre welcomed local

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7. Michael Hicks, *Mormonism and Music: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 153.

8. Citing Eugene England, “The Dawning of a Brighter Day: Mormon Literature after 150 Years,” *BYU Studies* 22/1 (1982): 17.

and out-of-town talent. Givens speculates on why spectacle and light dramatic fare are still common but tragedy less often enacted. “Some Mormon thinkers have recognized in this lack a cultural impoverishment” (p. 151). With a missionary message to proclaim and an emphasis on finding joy in the life of faith, “the consequence for Mormon culture has been an affinity for art forms that celebrate life rather than those that investigate its tragic dimensions or probe its pathos” (p. 152).

As he turns to recent drama, musical theater, and film in chapter 14, Givens is at his best as a critic of aesthetics, offering astute comments on Clinton Larson’s *The Mantle of the Prophet and Other Plays* (1966) and Martin Kelley’s *And They Shall Be Gathered* (1969). Reviewing the success of Carol Lynn Pearson and Lex de Azevedo’s *The Order Is Love* (1971), he describes the interplay of tensions between the pragmatism of the Orderville experiment and the outside world with its individuality, aesthetic beauties, and style (p. 269). He likes Orson Scott Card’s *Stone Tables* (1973) and *The Apostate*, as well as Robert Elliot’s *Fires of the Mind* (1974) and Thomas Roger’s *Huebener* (1976), the story of the seventeen-year-old Latter-day Saint boy in Germany who opposed the Nazi regime. Again works focused on conflict fit Givens’s theory of paradox: “*Huebener* is the most conflicted instance in Mormon history of an individual caught between . . . legitimate institutional imperatives and the quest for personal integrity” (p. 271).

Fascination with the history and effect of cinema leads to thorough coverage of Mormon film (pp. 271–83). Much of this parallels *BYU Studies*’s special issue “Mormons and Film,” where Givens’s own article “There Is Room for Both”: Mormon Cinema and the Paradoxes of Mormon Culture” (pp. 164–87) is excerpted from his book. He focuses on Richard Dutcher’s films *God’s Army*, *Brigham City*, and *States of Grace*. He also admires Ryan Little’s independent film *Saints and Soldiers* (2004) as “an effort to address more universal themes and experiences through the lens of an LDS sensibility” (p. 278). He describes in detail Greg Whiteley’s artistically filmed documentary *New York Doll* (2005), where Killer Kane, a rock star, converts to Mormonism, becomes a volunteer at the Family History

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9. See *BYU Studies* 46/2 (2007).

Library adjacent to the Los Angeles Temple, and is called back for a reunion concert. For the finale, rock music morphs into a Tabernacle Choir hymn. “Surprisingly, there is no discomfort, no discordance at all between the image and the music. And that seems to be the point: not merely a God or universe capacious enough to embrace diversity, but a universe in which the real and palpable possibilities of infinite transformation make all difference negligible” (p. 283). Such blends of astute commentary with theoretical insights mark Givens’s approach. The time he spends on film suggests his fascination with this art form as a religious conveyance.

In chapter 9 on early Mormon writing, Givens notes that, although centered in the Romantic era, “Mormonism from its very birth has found itself out of sync with the literary aesthetic that develops out of these Romantic agonies” (p. 158). Instead language is realistic. Returning to Joseph Smith’s personal history, the author, along with professor-poet Arthur Henry King, finds the style “noteworthy for its understated, dispassionate tone” (p. 159). Givens argues that in reporting visions Joseph managed “assimilation of supernatural experience to naturalistic discourse,” although as spokesman for the Lord his speech “*is* marked by distinctive diction and syntax, and with lasting effect on Mormon conceptions of sacred language” (p. 161). Nephi’s simple telling of his personal story in the opening chapter of the Book of Mormon influenced the style of Mormon diaries, and, for example, that of Artemisia Sidnie Myers, later Foote, recounting the dire events of the Haun’s Mill Massacre with straightforward accounting.

As to high art, Givens celebrates Parley P. Pratt as “eloquent” in sermons and autobiography with “rhetorical flourishes” (p. 165), a fine poet and satirist as well (pp. 169–70). Among poets, Givens mentions John Lyon and quotes from Eliza R. Snow. Although popular novels were mostly considered “literary decadence” (p. 171), home literature—safe fiction with morally improving themes—filled Mormon publications in late-nineteenth-century Utah like the *Woman’s Exponent*, *Contributor*, *Juvenile Instructor*, and *Young Woman’s Journal*.

Turning to twentieth-century literature in chapter 15, Givens mentions the ambitions of Orson F. Whitney to write an epic poem

in the style of Milton and O. U. Bean's adaptation of B. H. Roberts's short story "Corianton: A Nephite Story" into a play that ran in the Salt Lake Theatre and transferred briefly to Broadway (pp. 286–87). He treats literature under the headings of the lost generation, poetry, short fiction, the contemporary novel, science fiction, and the essay.

Givens offers extensive commentary on *Children of God* (1939), by Vardis Fisher; *The Giant Joshua* (1941), by Maurine Whipple; and *A Little Lower Than the Angels* (1942), by Virginia Sorensen, noting "with these three novels, writers proved capable of serious engagement with Mormonism as a literary theme and fostered a new era of public exposure of its history" (p. 287). Ever mindful of his thesis, he draws readers from particular works back to the general notion of paradox:

No one has succeeded better than Whipple at capturing the recurrent Mormon paradox: the independence and loneliness of an exiled people. Not since the myth of the Pilgrims has the saga of a second Canaan been so compellingly told. . . .

Planning and building worlds, whether earthly Zions or celestial habitations, is an enduring feature of the LDS ethic. Even if the endeavor, like Enoch's Zion of old, is one that accentuates the rift, rather than the relation, with the earthly city of man. Of course, the initial exuberance of a people gathering in Missouri to build a literal Zion has gradually metamorphosed into the quieter contentment of a people satisfied with a Zion that is now figuratively rendered as the church itself. Still, Mormonism's immersion in a rhetoric of founding epiphanies, supernatural manifestations, dialogic revelation, and ongoing spiritual experiences sometimes collapses, in parallel fashion, the distance that separates gold plates from suburban testimony meetings. (pp. 289–90)

Not every reader will welcome the movement from critique to theory throughout this study of Mormon culture, but the distinction of his work is his engagement with ideas. If, at some points, Givens embeds those ideas in heavy literary language to the peril of comprehension, that is a hazard the patient reader can weather. Givens's tone manifests



an ironic humor essential to his stance as an informed, professional, and independent critic.

Other significant insights into Mormon literature include distinctions among the craft of poets as diverse as Clinton F. Larson, Carol Lynn Pearson, Emma Lou Thayne, and Susan (Elizabeth) Howe. He samples contributions of story writers Levi Peterson, Douglas Thayer, Donald Marshall, Kevin Cassity, and Karen Rosenbaum without forgetting the notable story "Sayso or Sense," by Eileen (Gibbons) Kump. In his summary, Givens notes the present mainstreaming of Mormon peculiarities into contemporary idioms, seeing polarizing forces tugging at these artists:

Most religions accommodate the sad truth that the days of Pentecost are past. But in a religious culture like the Mormons', where buoyant optimism, living prophets, and the discourse of private revelations, testimony, and spiritual experiences dominate, the pressures to continually reenact the founding epiphanies of the first Prophet make for a culture that is spiritually vibrant but also, at times, quietly polarizing. . . . One need only turn to LDS intellectual culture to see a population vigorously working to carve out a niche for themselves in a church they find increasingly inhospitable to closet doubters and zealous revisionists alike. . . .

But writers have belabored a second polarization as well, and that is the isolation of those who know, or are supposed to know, from a larger culture that appears, by contrast, benighted and inferior. (p. 313)

Among notable novels, Givens reviews Levi Peterson's *Backslider* (1986), Michael Fillerup's *Beyond the River* (1995), Alan Mitchell's *Angel of the Danube* (2000), and Margaret Blair Young's *Salvador* (1992). All treat young people coming of age, the middle two through the missionary experience. Givens nicely points out what brings satisfaction in this fiction as he pays tribute to Young's achievement: "A Mormon version of *Heart of Darkness*, the novel achieves what the great Mormon novel has to: moral complexity, an unflinching gaze

into the universe's tragic dimension, and a celebration of life that is stripped of sentimentality but not sentiment" (p. 319).

Readers of science fiction will be pleased that Givens does not neglect the achievements of Orson Scott Card in science fiction and particularly commends his *Ender's* saga. He also calls attention to the contribution of Brigham Young University's student magazine the *Leading Edge*, since "speculative fiction," using the preferred SF term, has been a fertile field for young Latter-day Saint writers, where "the reality of multiple inhabited worlds is not the only doctrine that invites creative speculation of an LDS bent" (p. 320). He concludes this section with a nod to essay writers Eugene England, Elbert Peck, and Levi Peterson, just an introductory view, in my opinion, to a notable sector of Mormon writing.<sup>10</sup>

Chapter 10 on visual art introduces readers to the early portrait painters Sutcliffe Maudsley and William Warner Major (p. 181) and to landscape artists George Ottinger, Dan Weggeland, and Alfred Lambourne. Givens offers the astute insight that artists who actually walked the trails to Zion "tend to emphasize the domestication of nature by the hand of man over the pristine beauty of a land unspoiled by the colonizer's spade" (p. 186). Further, Givens sees their work "as a modern counterpart to Renaissance persecution narratives by the masters" because they look sympathetically at the lives of a driven people (p. 187). This attitude is fixed in C. C. A. Christensen's historic panoramas, and Givens puts touring art shows like this into historical perspective by comparing Christensen with John Banvard, an early American painter of panoramas of the Mississippi River (pp. 184, 188).

He extends his overview of visual artists in chapter 16 to cover the art missionaries of the 1890s. De rigueur, he notes the work of LeConte Stewart among Utah's landscape artists; Minerva Teichert, who tells the Mormon story through her murals; and Arnold Friberg, who produced epic paintings. He evaluates sculptures by Cyrus Dallin and Mahonri Young and the interpretive bronzes of Avard Fairbanks.

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10. Cherry B. Silver, "Elegant Angst: Mining the Treasures of Mormon Personal Essays, 1982–2001," *Irreantum: Magazine of the Association for Mormon Letters* 5/1 (2003): 36–41.

He deplores the trend of “orthodox illustration” represented by the church and its turning for depictions of scriptural stories to Carl Bloch, a nineteenth-century Danish painter, and to contemporary non-Mormons Harry Anderson, Tom Lovell, and Kenneth Riley. Revitalizing the use of Latter-day Saint artists, however, he sees, “by 1956, tentative efforts . . . to forge an aesthetic that would incorporate LDS religiosity into studio art. . . . With the Art and Belief movement, accomplished artists would experiment with themes more explicitly identifiable with Mormon theology and culture” (p. 333). An exhibition entitled *Art and Belief* in the winter of 1966–67 featured work by Dale T. Fletcher, Trevor Southey, Gary E. Smith, Dennis Smith, and Larry Prestwich. Since then, publications such as *Dialogue* have featured Latter-day Saint artists in their pages and on their covers. The Springville Art Museum, under director Vern Swanson, has collected broadly and, as Givens footnotes, produced a landmark collection, *Utah Painting and Sculpture* (1997). The Museum of Church History and Art has sponsored international art competitions. Its senior curator, Richard Oman, however, feels that Givens downplays the impact of the Museum in promoting and purchasing significant new art.<sup>11</sup> This neglect may simply be a consequence of multiplying resources for him to evaluate. Givens does point out “church preference for non-controversial art” with “a tendency to veer toward the sentimental” in such painters as Greg Olsen (he writes Grey Olsen) and Liz Lemon (Swindle) (p. 335). He calls attention to the notable work of Walter Rane and the international achievement of James C. Christensen and concludes by honoring the Mormon Artists Group in New York City, seeing potential for further expansiveness.

With the church possessing a membership that has since the mid-1990s shifted to a predominantly non-American one, Utah landscapes and even pioneer history will have less resonance to Mormon ears and eyes, and the center of gravity will continue to shift further afield. Even renditions of scriptural characters and motifs will necessarily be rethought

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11. Richard Oman, personal interview with the author, March 2008.

and reworked, to lose their American coloration and cultural naïveté, as had to happen to the blue-eyed Jesus of the Victorians.

. . . As response to the international art exhibit shows, however, art holds forth the promise of giving the most immediate, vibrant, and creative expression to the diversity of an international Mormon culture. (pp. 337–38)

In his conclusion, Terryl Givens moves beyond the skepticism characteristic of much of his analysis to reveal the innate excitement he feels about Mormon art and culture: “As an ethnic culture, Mormonism may still be in its adolescence. But Joseph Smith appears to have provided that culture with sufficient tensions and paradoxes to generate vigorous artistic and intellectual expression for another 200 years. The competing centrifugal and centripetal forces that characterize Mormonism show no sign—fortunately—of imminent resolution” (pp. 343–44). It is such unresolved tension that has attracted Givens to this extended study of the life of the Mormon mind and should earn the reader’s admiration. He speaks to readers who will appreciate the power of Mormon theology to motivate cultural achievements in an indeterminate world where individual efforts matter but perfect results are seldom achieved.

### Evaluation

What would improve Givens’s analysis of this world of religion and culture? Updating of sources, I would say, and in several cases more background or accuracy of detail.

For example, to illustrate the wit and literary acumen of young adults involved in the Wasatch Literary Association established in 1875, Givens, drawing on Ronald Walker’s research, cites verses from a poem written by Bud Whitney that refers to Mrs. Sears and “little Em.”

Each Sunday morn to visit Mrs. Sears,  
The lovely form of little Em appears.  
Unconscious, half of all her blooming charms,  
Yet well inured to love and loves alarms.

White gauzy skirts pinned backward hard and tight,  
 Still other charms afford the eager sight. (p. 93)

Givens cleverly points out the poem's purposeful imitation of Oliver Goldsmith's "Deserted Village." But to my mind it would deepen the significance of the quotation if Givens identified the subjects of the caricature and placed them in their historical context. "Bud" Whitney was Horace Gibson Whitney, later drama critic and managing editor of the *Deseret News*. The females are children of Emmeline B. Wells, in whose parlor the Wasatch was founded. Mrs. Sears was Isabel Modalena Whitney, daughter of Newel K. Whitney and Emmeline, thus a cousin once removed to "Bud" and married to an up-and-coming merchant, Septimus W. Sears. "Little Em" was Emma Whitney Wells, first daughter of Emmeline and Daniel H. Wells. She was one of the charter members of the Wasatch who could safely and affectionately be parodied. As Walker points out, the attraction of such light literary entertainment for children of prominent church families worried President Young and motivated him to sponsor an association within the church for young men. To lead the Y.M.M.I.A., he tapped Junius F. Wells, son of Daniel Wells, and also called Orson F. Whitney and Rulon S. Wells on missions, as if to harness properly the Wasatch's spontaneous intellectual activity.<sup>12</sup> I find these links fascinating. My urging, then, is for Givens to deepen the insights he offers with helpful historical background.

A second suggestion is to check for accuracy in detail. In chapter 9, for instance, Givens links home literature with the *Woman's Exponent*, which was as much a news and political journal as a site for poetry, essays, and occasional fiction. Contemporary publications—the *Contributor*, *Juvenile Instructor*, and *Young Woman's Journal*—indeed featured stories, poetry, and articles of general interest. In one respect, Givens's reference to the *Woman's Exponent* is abbreviated and misleading. He mentions only the founding editor Louisa Lula Greene (not with her married name, Richards, by which she is usually cited) but does not refer to her long-term successor, editor Emmeline B.

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12. See Walker, *Qualities That Count*, 72.

Wells. As biographer Carol Cornwall Madsen explains, Wells “served as sole proprietor and publisher” for thirty-five years. Givens mistakenly writes, “Founded as a semi-private venture, the magazine eventually became the official organ of the church’s relief society and would run until 1914” (p. 177). In fact, it remained a private paper and was only “official” in reporting church women’s activities and taking a prochurch editorial stance. Ironically, when Emmeline finally offered the publication to the Relief Society, that organization declined to take it on and instead, in 1915, established its own quite different publication, the *Relief Society Magazine*, with Susa Young Gates as editor.<sup>13</sup>

Such limitations in reporting, I believe, arise from the range of Givens’s readings. He cites many early journal articles like Leonard Arrington’s in the 1971 *Dialogue* and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher’s in 1978 as well as collections of essays on Mormon women and writers published in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. He has looked at originals of several publications, including the *Times and Seasons*, *Messenger and Advocate*, and the *Contributor*, but perhaps not the *Woman’s Exponent*, because the editors are clearly listed on the masthead. Evidently he did not have access to the 2006 Emmeline B. Wells biography nor the extensive earlier articles on her work with the *Woman’s Exponent* by Carol Cornwall Madsen. He misses full biographies on subjects of interest, like T. Edgar Lyon Jr.’s *John Lyon: The Life of a Pioneer Poet* (1989). And of course scholarship rolls on. The reader might like to know about books in process, particularly Jill Mulvay Derr and Karen Lynn Davidson’s analysis of Eliza R. Snow poetry to be completed in 2008. Because Oxford University Press did not print a bibliography for *People of Paradox*, the reader is dependent on scanning through hundreds of footnotes to locate appropriate sources.

Overall, Givens has situated Mormon culture and its worldview within the mainstream of Western thought. He is uniquely qualified, as a specialist in American intellectual history and comparative literature, to theorize and make judgments. His critiques of individual works are necessarily limited in scope, but this major study cannot be

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13. Carol Cornwall Madsen, *An Advocate for Women: The Public Life of Emmeline B. Wells: 1870–1920* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 43–45; 63 n. 40.

ignored in present and future discussions of how Mormons think and what they are capable of creating.