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Elvis Has Left the Library

Identifying Forged Annotations in a Book of Mormon

Keith A. Erekson

For nearly three decades, the ghost of Elvis Presley has hung over the historical collections of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In 1989, a copy of the Book of Mormon was donated that contained marginal annotations purportedly by the “King of Rock and Roll.” Word of the acquisition spread quickly by fireside speakers, classroom teachers, and newspaper columnists. Requests to see and touch the book came repeatedly, so much so that by 2002 the book’s binding had cracked and a digital copy was made for visitors who came each week for a peek. In 2007, an independent film shown at the sixth annual LDS Film Festival in Orem, Utah, used the book as its launching point for a highly creative look at Presley’s later years, titled *Tears of a King: The Latter Days of Elvis*. Now, more than forty years after Presley’s death, the story of his handwriting in this Book of Mormon continues to circulate regularly throughout the Latter-day Saint market for “uplifting” books and social media content.¹

1. See, for example, Paul Skousen, “The King and I,” *Latter-Day Sentinel*, July 26, 1989, A8–A9; Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Elder Elvis? Was the King Close to Converting to Mormon Faith?” *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 14, 2001, C1; Cathy Free, “Utahn All Shook Up over Elvis,” *Deseret News*, August 8, 2002, <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/929939/Utahn-all-shook-up-over-Elvis.html>; Greg Hill, “Church in Memphis Is on the Rise,” *Church News*, May 30, 2003, 11; Keith McCord, “Movie Shows Spiritual Side of Elvis,” KSL, September 15, 2006, <https://www.ksl.com/?nid=148&sid=494190>; Lynn Arave, “Elvis Almost LDS?” *Deseret News*, October 2, 2006, <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/650195503/Elvis-almost-LDS.html>; Michael Rigert, “Elvis Had a Book

Perhaps the most surprising part of this story is how confidently the tale has been told with so little analysis. Journalist Peggy Fletcher Stack presented a detailed recitation of the story in 2001, concluding only tepidly, “As to whether the notes in The Book of Mormon really were made by Elvis, no one can be sure.” Filmmaker Rob Diamond wrote, shot, and produced *Tears of a King* without authenticating the handwriting. He reportedly planned to hire an expert, but “I do have my personal beliefs,” he said, and “I wouldn’t have made the film unless I felt strongly about it.” Published efforts to authenticate “Mormon myths” simply passed along the story with little effort at authentication. In public, Church History Department staff gave neither an endorsement nor a denial. “We believe Elvis owned it,” said one photo archivist in 2001, “but we make no claims about the authenticity of the handwriting.” Another staff member followed up a few years later by confirming that the archive held the book and that no authentication had ever been done: “All we know is what has been told to us.” Despite the lack of verification, boosters of the film happily (and repeatedly) reported that the archive allowed the book to be used during shooting.² This, it seemed, was a storyteller’s dream—a faith-promoting story with touchable roots in the Church’s historical collection.

of Mormon,” *Daily Herald*, September 24, 2006, B12; Rob Diamond, *Tears of a King* (7 Films 7 Productions, 2007); “Filmmakers to Share Experiences of Making Elvis Presley Bio-Movie at LDS Film Festival,” *Meridian Magazine*, January 16, 2007, <https://ldsmag.com/article-1-1114/>; Roger L. Hardy, “‘Tears of King’ Shows Spiritual Side of Elvis,” *Deseret News*, January 24, 2008, <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/695246024/Tears-of-King-shows-spiritual-side-of-Elvis.html>; KSL News, “Fact or Fiction? Mormon Stories and Urban Legends,” 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxPJoPHjKfc>; Danielle B. Wagner, “21 Famous People Who Have Been Given a Book of Mormon,” *LDS Living*, August 22, 2018, <http://www.ldsliving.com/Famous-People-Who-Have-Been-Given-a-Book-of-Mormon/s/77518>.

2. Stack, “Elder Elvis?” C1; Rob Diamond, quoted in Rigert, “Elvis Had a Book of Mormon,” B12. Church History Department staff, quoted in Stack, “Elder Elvis?” C1; and Arave, “Elvis Almost LDS?”; J. Michael Hunter, *Mormon Mythellaneous: Amazing True Mormon Stories—and Some That Should Be!* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2008), 196–97. See also “If You Could Hie to Graceland,” *Sunstone*, no. 143 (November 2006): 78; “Filmmakers to Share Experiences”; Roger L. Hardy, “Film Explores Elvis-LDS Link,” *Deseret News*, January 25, 2007, <https://www.deseretnews.com/article/650225300/Film-explores-Elvis-LDS-link.html>.

In the four years that I've served as director of the Church History Library, I've heard the story of this book numerous times, but I only called the book out of the stacks after a Salt Lake City television station wanted to film yet another telling. As I examined the volume, the annotations on its pages immediately raised more questions than answers. Internal records revealed that others had likewise questioned the book's authenticity, as early as 1991 and as recently as 2008. My research accelerated, drawing on a host of recently published works that document Elvis's life and activities more clearly than ever before. The passage of time has introduced more authentic samples of Presley's handwriting into the market, as well as more forgeries to be identified by collectors, dealers, and auction houses.³ By examining the opportunities for Presley to have read this volume and by carefully analyzing the handwriting throughout its pages, I can now affirm that Elvis Presley did not write in this Book of Mormon.⁴ This article describes a collection of items in the Church History Library related to Elvis Presley, places the collection's provenance within the context of Presley's life, and analyzes the handwriting within the book's pages. The conclusion of forgery has been corroborated by industry experts in authenticating Elvis Presley's handwriting.

ABOUT THE COLLECTION

Though the copy of the Book of Mormon purportedly marked by Elvis has received most of the attention in the media and popular culture, the

3. I acknowledge Brandon Metcalf, Christy Best, and Robin Jensen for reviewing my preliminary findings and coaching me in the art and science of handwriting analysis. Brian Reeves, Jeff Anderson, Steve Sorenson, Glenn Rowe, and LaVonne Gaw walked this pathway before me, leaving clues to guide my way. Joan Nay, Lis Allen, Keali'i Haverly, and Brooks Haderlie aided my research. Reid Neilson, Steve Harper, and Deb Abercrombie provided encouragement; Alan Osmond provided inspiration. A dinner conversation with Carolyn, Emily, Alyse, Haley, and Lyndie turned into a charge to get to the bottom of this. To all of these I simply say, "Thank you, thank you very much."

4. These findings were announced in Keith A. Erekson, "Elvis Presley's Copy of the Book of Mormon Ain't Nothin' but a Forgery, Church History Experts Say," *Church News*, November 14, 2018, <https://www.thechurchnews.com/history-revisited/2018-11-14/elvis-presleys-copy-of-the-book-of-mormon-aint-nothin-but-a-forgery-church-history-experts-say-48425>. My research notes are preserved in Keith A. Erekson, "Elvis Presley Research Notes," Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

Church History Library actually holds a collection of six items related to this story: two books and four photographs. In 1989, the donation of the Book of Mormon was accompanied by three photographs—one of the donor, Cricket Coulter, with Elvis in Beverly Hills, California, on August 30, 1968; one of Elvis on a motorcycle in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1956; and one of Elvis on a motorcycle with his cousin Billy Smith at Graceland in 1974. In 2002, Coulter contributed a two-in-one volume containing the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price and an undated photograph of herself and an unidentified woman with Elvis. The Library was not given intellectual rights to any of the photographs and cannot reproduce them in print or online.⁵

The two-in-one combination volume was published in 1974 with a soft red cover. The title page of the Doctrine and Covenants contains three inscriptions by the donor. The first in blue ink, reads “Cricket & Jerry Butler 8-2-77.” The words “& Jerry” have been written over in black ink with the word “Mendell.” The second inscription is in black ink and reads “8-2-77 Elvis, You asked for it. Love, Cricket 8-2-77.” The final inscription is in blue ink and reads “Returned to me 8-31-77 by Vernon Presley (Elvis’ Dad).” Within the volume are handwritten annotations on 40 pages, the first occurring on page 2 of the Doctrine and Covenants and the last on page 27 of the Pearl of Great Price, a pattern that suggests Elvis read the book and engaged with its contents almost from cover to cover. The annotations are made in red, blue, and black ink and consist of square brackets (22 instances), underlining (18), circles (2), a star (1), and an arrow (1). On 35 of the 40 annotated pages, there are also words written in the margin. However, for 17 of the 35 textual annotations, the author has signed a name and a date. These annotations were made after Elvis’s death, in 1981, 1982, and 1983 by at least three missionaries. The names of three additional missionaries are also recorded in the margins. Because the evidence for tampering with this volume after the death of Elvis is so clear, I did not submit it to any further investigation.⁶

5. Cricket Marie Coulter, “Annotated Copies of the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, 1976–1977,” Church History Library.

6. Annotations unique to the combination volume include the use of red ink, square brackets, the star, and the arrow. The missionaries who signed the volume are Elders Evans (August 1981), Belliston (September 1981), and Lundburg (April 24, 1982); those named in the volume are Elders Gibson, Barney, and Papa. The earliest dated entry is August 1981, and the latest is unsigned on February 12, 1983.

Crispet ^{W. H.} Butler

Donated to Jimmy Velot
for the Elvis Presley
Museum 12-7-79.
Returned 8-11-81.

This book was given ~~and~~ to me
by Elvis' dad, Vernon Presley on
Aug 19, 1977.

To Elvis,

You said you
wanted to read this
Enjoy - it's interesting
& enlightening. God
bless you always,
my friend. God may
you always be
filled with His
sweet, sweet spirit.

Love, Crispet

FIGURE 1. Inside front cover of the Book of Mormon. Photograph by author.

The donated Book of Mormon was published in 1976 with a soft, light-blue cover featuring a golden angel Moroni. The inside front cover contains six inscriptions (fig. 1), which read as follows from the top of the page to the bottom:

1. “Cricket & Jerry Butler” in black ink
2. “8-2-77” and “Mendell” in blue ink, the latter being written over “& Jerry” of the first inscription
3. “Donated to Jimmy Velvet for the Elvis Presley Museum 12-7-79.” in black ink
4. “Returned 8-11-81.” in black ink
5. “This book was given back to me by Elvis’ dad, Vernon Presley on Aug 19, 1977.” in black ink
6. “To Elvis, You said you wanted to read this. Enjoy—it’s interesting & enlightening. God bless you always, my friend. And may you always be filled with His sweet sweet spirit. Love, Cricket” in blue ink.

The final inscription marking the gift of the book from Cricket to Elvis is undated, but the date of August 2 was written at the top of the page and is the same date given in the Doctrine and Covenants. It also appears to make a reference to the popular 1962 gospel song “Sweet, Sweet Spirit” by Doris Mae “Dot” Akers, a song that was never recorded by Elvis but sung by his backup singers, J. D. Sumner & the Stamps, including during one of his concerts.⁷

Within the Book of Mormon volume are handwritten annotations on 89 of the book’s 558 pages—nearly 1 of every 6 pages. The first annotation appears on the first page of the book and the last one on its last page (page 558, in the index), giving the impression that Elvis read the entire book and engaged with its contents from beginning to end. The annotations are made in black and blue ink and consist of underlining (47 instances), curved brackets in the margins (34), check marks (21),

7. J. D. Sumner & the Stamps sang backup for Elvis from 1971 until his death in 1977, and multiple versions of their singing may be found on YouTube. On the writing and popularity of Akers’s “Sweet, Sweet Spirit,” see C. Michael Hawn, “History of Hymns: ‘Sweet, Sweet Spirit,’” *Discipleship Ministries: The United Methodist Church*, <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-sweet-sweet-spirit>. For a list of songs recorded by Elvis Presley, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_songs_recorded_by_Elvis_Presley.

and circles (12). On 36 of the 89 annotated pages, words are also written in the margins—including 17 instances of single words, such as “good” or “mine”; 7 instances of two-word phrases, such as “me too”; 2 instances of three-word phrases; 3 instances of four-word phrases; and 3 instances of five-word phrases; and 1 instance each of phrases that are seven, eight, ten, and fourteen words long. There are a total of 103 words written in the margins through the entire book.⁸ Unlike the two-in-one volume, this book does not present evidence of additional persons making annotations in the book. The quantity and length of the annotations, together with the appearance of only one style of handwriting, provide opportunity to analyze this handwriting and compare it to authentic samples of Elvis’s known writing. But first we must consider the question of whether the book could have even found its way into his hands.

PROVENANCE

The basic outline of how this copy of the Book of Mormon made its way into the Church’s archives has been repeatedly told in the news media. It all started with superfan Cricket Coulter, who had followed Elvis Presley for more than a decade before giving him the book. Born in Ohio in 1948, she began a lifelong obsession with “the King” while in fifth grade, founding a fan club at age ten that she later named “Elvis—He Touched Me” after his Grammy-winning song by the same name. She lived in an apartment near his home in California, had homes near Graceland in Memphis and in Las Vegas, attended 533 of his concerts, and appeared as an uncredited fan in his 1970 documentary *Elvis: That’s the Way It Is*, in which the twenty-two-year-old distanced herself from the crazy, teeny-bopper fans, declaring, “I think I’m too mature for that. I’m more of a quiet fan.” She was baptized into the Church in Memphis in the summer of 1976.⁹

8. For verification, I cross-checked the physical volume against microfilm and electronic copies made previously by Church History Department staff. I thank my daughter, Haley Noelle Erekson, for double-checking every page of the electronic copy of the volume.

9. Cricket Coulter’s statement occurs about eleven minutes into Denis Sanders, *Elvis: That’s the Way It Is*, documentary, 1970, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0065687/>. See Stack, “Elder Elvis?” C1; Free, “Utahn All Shook Up over Elvis”; Megan Murphy, “Cricket Coulter @ Elvis Week 2011,” *Back in Memphis* (blog), October 15, 2011, <http://backinmemphis.blogspot.com/2011/10/cricket-coulter-elvis-week-2011.html>. Born Cricket Mendell, in 1977, she was married to Jerry Butler and signed the Book of Mormon as Cricket Butler. She presents her name

Coulter reports giving the book to Elvis on August 2, 1977, and that his father returned it to her on August 19, 1977. Over the years, she shared two different stories about why the book was returned to her. In one version, Vernon Presley didn't want Elvis's interest in the Church to be known, so he slipped the book out of the house and into her custody. This version strains credulity because an effort to hide the book would not have resulted in its delivery to a fan who would cherish and tell the story. Vernon would have simply destroyed the book (as had been done previously with Elvis's spiritual books). In the other story, because Cricket was a fan of the Osmonds as well as Presley, she reported that the book was given to her to pass along because Elvis wanted the Osmonds to have it. If so, why did she wait so long, and why did she first try to give the book to Jimmy Velvet?¹⁰ In either case, Coulter later showed the book to Alan Osmond, who "interviewed her on cassette tape" and "had her sign a letter of authenticity." Having documented Coulter's claims, Osmond forwarded the book to Elder Rex Pinegar, a relative by marriage then serving as a General Authority, who delivered the book to the executive director of the Church Historical Department.¹¹ The volume was accessioned into the Church's collection in July 1989. Thanks to Alan Osmond's careful documentation, the chain of provenance from Coulter to the Church is thoroughly documented, but what about the most important links in the chain, those between Coulter and Elvis Presley?¹² Did Elvis read and mark this copy of the Book of Mormon

as Cricket-Marie Coulter in her self-published book, *Elvis's Real Gold: The Spirit of His Fans* (privately published, 2002). She uses Cricket Coulter on both of her Facebook pages, <https://www.facebook.com/cricketmarie.coulterharris> (current) and <https://www.facebook.com/cricket.coulter> (2010–2013).

10. The first version is reported in Stack, "Elder Elvis?" C1; the second appears in Donny Osmond and Patricia Romanowski, *Life Is Just What You Make It* (New York: Hyperion, 1999), 168–69. The book-burning incident is reported in Priscilla Beaulieu Presley, *Elvis and Me* (New York: Berkley Books, 1985), 234. Approached more than twenty years later at a guitar show in Nashville, Velvet could not remember an interaction with Cricket Coulter. Brad Hardisty, phone call with Keith A. Erekson, November 17, 2018. Velvet's transaction records from the period are not available.

11. Stack, "Elder Elvis?" C1; Arave, "Elvis Almost LDS?"; Hardy, "Film Explores Elvis-LDS Link."

12. In the autograph business, certificates of authenticity (COA) are treated with deep suspicion. "Remember a COA is just a piece of paper that anyone—you, I, a reputed dealer, a trusted source, amateur or indeed a fraudster can

during the fourteen days that it was reportedly in his possession in August 1977? Can Coulter's timeline be corroborated?

The last two weeks of Elvis Presley's life were anything but uneventful.¹³ He returned to Graceland from touring at the end of June 1977, and his nine-year-old daughter, Lisa Marie, arrived on July 31. Beyond his daughter, he saw few people during these weeks, principally a few close friends, his doctor, and his twenty-year-old fiancée, Ginger Alden, who brought her ten-year-old niece along to play with Lisa. During this period, Elvis rode motorcycles once, played racquetball once, rented the local amusement park to entertain the kids, and held a private screening of several films. On one evening, he and Ginger visited her family, where he sang and talked excitedly about numerology. Beyond hosting his daughter and visiting family, Elvis was also reeling from the publication of a devastating exposé of his prescription drug abuse and violent behavior. The book, titled *Elvis, What Happened?* relates numerous experiences from three of his former bodyguards about his careless and reckless behavior.¹⁴ His biographer notes that Elvis "alternated between bouts of depression and moments of defiance" as well as "waves of shame and rage" as he worried about the book and his career.¹⁵ And he was preparing to leave on tour on August 16, which involved "many hours and days of planning and coordination." At the same time, he was avoiding and reluctantly starting a liquid diet. This tour would be the first time he would face his fans after the exposé, and he was concerned. Elvis was also sparring with Ginger and trying to persuade her to go with him on tour. Alden reported that Elvis read "some spiritual books"

create at will," states authenticator Garry Gomersall. His first tip for avoiding mistakes is "*Be sceptical of COAs—COAs do NOT provide a guarantee of authenticity. To the contrary they are used by unscrupulous sellers to lure the buyer into a false sense of security.*" Garry Gomersall, "Authenticating Elvis Presley Autographs," *ElvisToday.com*, January 5, 2009, <http://www.elvistoday.com/index.php/autographs104/155-authenticating-elvis-presley-autographs.html>, emphasis in original.

13. The timeline is reconstructed from Peter Guralnick, *Careless Love: The Unmaking of Elvis Presley* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1999), 641–61; Peter Guralnick and Ernst Jorgensen, *Elvis: Day by Day* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999), 376–79; Ginger Alden, *Elvis & Ginger* (New York: Berkley Books, 2014), 327–29, 331–32.

14. Red West, Sonny West, and Dave Hebler, as told to Steve Dunleavy, *Elvis, What Happened?* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1977).

15. Guralnick, *Careless Love*, 643–44.

during the summer but named only *A Scientific Search for the Face of Jesus* about the Shroud of Turin and *Sex and Psychic Energy*.¹⁶

Timeline of July 31–August 19, 1977

- July 31 Elvis's daughter Lisa Marie arrives for a two-week visit.
- August 2 Cricket Coulter reportedly gives a Book of Mormon to Elvis Presley.
- August 4 *Elvis, What Happened?* is published.
- August 6 Elvis and Ginger Alden visit her family.
- August 7 Elvis and Ginger are at home in the evening.
- August 8 Elvis rents Libertyland amusement park in the early-morning hours.
- August 10 Elvis watches several films.
- August 14 Elvis goes motorcycling with Ginger and Billy and Jo Smith.
- August 15 Elvis wakes at 4:00 p.m., rides a golf cart with Lisa, and goes to the dentist at 10:30 p.m.
- August 16 Elvis plays racquetball in the early hours, takes medications, and dies.
- August 17 Presley family holds a viewing for Elvis attended by thousands.
- August 18 Presley family holds a funeral and buries Elvis.
- August 19 Vernon Presley reportedly returns the Book of Mormon to Cricket Coulter.

In the midst of hosting his daughter, worrying about the exposé, and planning for his upcoming tour, did Elvis receive a copy of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price from Cricket Coulter? It is possible. Did he read and ponder the nearly 1,000 pages of text in the volumes and leave handwritten annotations on 112 of those pages? It is very unlikely.

16. Nancy B. Rooks and Jim Cox, *Inside Graceland: Elvis' Maid Remembers* (Bloomington, Ind.: Xlibris, 2005), 96–98; Alden, *Elvis & Ginger*, 324, 338–39. Frank O. Adams, *A Scientific Search for the Face of Jesus* (Tucson, Ariz.: Psychological Aid Foundation, 1972); Betty Bethards, *Sex and Psychic Energy* (Novato, Calif.: Inner Light Foundation, 1977).

HANDWRITING ANALYSIS

If a review of the book's provenance set within the context of Elvis Presley's last two weeks of life strains plausibility, then analysis of the handwriting in the volume leaves no room for doubt. The content of the annotations has so captured public imagination that the fact that the book contains a signature has scarcely been mentioned. But neither the signature nor the marginal annotations match authentic samples of Presley's handwriting, a fact corroborated by leading external authenticators of Elvis Presley handwriting.

Signature

The first page of the Book of Mormon contains the forged signature "E. A. Presley." Elvis always signed "Elvis Presley" for fan autographs, but on formal documents such as contracts and especially on checks he was known to sign "Elvis A. Presley" or "E. A. Presley." Because Elvis autographs—real and fake—surface so often in the collecting and auction markets, analysts and authenticators have amassed dozens of authentic samples and published several detailed studies of his handwriting. As collector Garry Gomersall noted in reflecting on thirty-five years in the business, "I've seen and been offered literally hundreds, possibly thousands of 'genuine' Elvis autographs—most of them fake." It is unknown how many times Elvis signed his autograph, but among authentic signatures there are variations and changes over time. He never signed for requests that came by mail (his secretaries and staff did), and he wrote few personal letters. A fan who wanted an authentic signature had to catch Elvis in person.¹⁷

Music industry autograph authenticator and collector Roger Epperson provided the most thorough history of Presley's handwriting in a two-part series for *Autograph Collector* magazine, subtitled "'The Story of Elvis' Autograph through Every Loop and Turn." He observed that

17. Gomersall, "Authenticating Elvis Presley Autographs." For samples of fan autographs and formal documents, see Bill White, "A Collector's Guide to Elvis," RRAuction.com, accessed November 29, 2018, <https://www.rrauction.com/elvis.cfm>; color photographs of signatures may be viewed at "Elvis Autographs: Real or Fake: Authenticating Elvis Presley Autographs," Elvis Australia, May 20, 2010, <https://www.elvis.com.au/presley/elvis-autographs.shtml>. For examples of Elvis Presley's signature on formal documents, including his divorce (1972), divorce supplement (1972), and last will and testament (March 3, 1977), see Jimmy Velvet's Elvis Presley Museum at elvispresleymuseum.com.

Elvis was “consistently inconsistent . . . in the way he signed.” Further, by the 1970s, the combination of stress and poor health was reflected in handwriting that grew more “shaky and inconsistent” and lost its previous “easy fluidity.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, to the careful observer, there are “some consistencies”¹⁹ in Elvis’s autograph that can be used to establish that Elvis Presley did not sign the Book of Mormon in the Church History Library.

An authentic “E. A. Presley” signature is reproduced in figure 2, and the forged signature from the Book of Mormon in the Church History Library is reproduced in figure 3.²⁰ Several elements of the forged signature resemble known general characteristics of authentic signatures. For example, Elvis did sign “E. A. Presley,” the line of the signature rises to the right, and he typically wrote the words on a single line (unless space would not allow). In both authentic signatures and the forgery, the *P* in Presley is the largest and most prominent letter and the initial *A* is a large rendering of the lowercase letter.²¹ The forger knew a little bit about Presley’s signature.

Despite a general resemblance, however, significant differences appear in nearly every letter—the second *e* is missing, the *s* is misformed, and the *l* and *y* slant improperly (see table 1 for details). The

18. Roger Epperson, “It’s Good to Be King: The Story of Elvis’ Autograph through Every Loop and Turn, Part I: 1955–66,” *Autograph Collector* (April/May 2007): 55; Roger Epperson, “Elvis: The Later Years, 1967–1977,” *Autograph Collector* (August/September 2007): 83.

19. White, “Collector’s Guide to Elvis.”

20. For my analysis, I examined thirty-three authentic “E. A. Presley” signatures on checks— nine of the dozens of checks on public display in the exhibits at Elvis Presley’s Graceland; fourteen checks reproduced in the “history” section of the Graceland Auctions website, <http://auction.graceland.com/>; and ten checks that have been reproduced in published works such as Alden, *Elvis & Ginger*, first color plate (two checks dated December 17, 1976, and June 2, 1977); Epperson, “Elvis: The Later Years,” 83 (two checks dated October 16, 1975, and December 3, 1975); Heritage Auctions staff, “The Elvis Collection,” *Heritage Magazine for the Intelligent Collector* 17 (Summer/Fall 2012): 62 (check dated July 23, 1975); Gillian G. Gaar, *Elvis the Legend; The Authorized Book from the Graceland Archives* (London: Carlton Books, 2017), 62 (check dated February 14, 1964), 74 (check dated August 24, 1966), 91 (check dated July 17, 1970), 176 (check dated December 11, 1963); and Willie G. Moseley, “Collecting Elvis,” *Heritage Magazine for the Intelligent Collector* 17 (Summer/Fall 2012): 49 (check dated September 27, 1958).

21. White, “Collector’s Guide to Elvis”; Gomersall, “Authenticating Elvis Presley Autographs.”

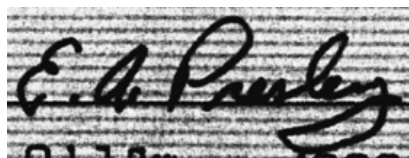


FIGURE 2. Authentic signature from a check dated October 16, 1975. Courtesy Roger Epperson.

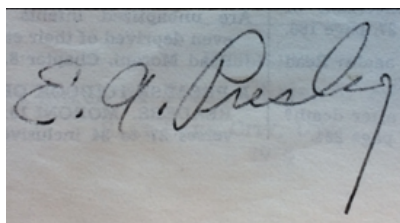


FIGURE 3. Forged Signature in the Book of Mormon in the Church History Library, purportedly made in August 1977. Photograph by the author.

Table 1. Comparison of Authentic Signatures with the Forged Signature

Letter	Authentic Signatures	Forged Signature
E.	Often contains a loop at top and in center ¹	No loop at top or center
A.	Narrow opening, slants right, short tail curves up	Rounded opening, less slant, long straight tail
P	Always separated from “resley” ²	Connected to “resley”
r	Square topped	Peaked
s	Open at the bottom and looks like an <i>r</i> ³	Closed at the bottom
l	Narrow loop or no loop, tilts right ⁴	Loop more rounded than typical
e	Almost always present, even if only as a small bump ⁵	Missing (or the <i>y</i> is misformed)
y	Distinctive, wide loop, different trailing characteristics ⁶	Either missing its upper curve (or misformed), unlooped <i>y</i> more common in 1950s; terminates in a “blunt ending” typical of forgeries generally

1. Gomersall, “Authenticating Elvis Presley Autographs.”

2. White, “Collector’s Guide to Elvis”; Gomersall, “Authenticating Elvis Presley Autographs.”

3. White, “Collector’s Guide to Elvis.”

4. White, “Collector’s Guide to Elvis.”

5. Epperson, “It’s Good to Be King,” 56; White, “Collector’s Guide to Elvis.”

6. Gomersall, “Authenticating Elvis Presley Autographs.” For examples of known variations with the trailing *y*, see White, “Collector’s Guide to Elvis.”

two most significant differences are the connection between the *P* and “resley” and the missing final *e* in the forged signature, two telltale signs of forgery.²² Collectively, the differences add up to a clear determination of a forged signature. Writing for Boston-based RR Auction, authenticator Bill White summarized Elvis forgeries as follows: “There is always something missing, be it misformed letters, an improper slant, the wrong relative size of things, the wrong overall feel.”²³ Elvis Presley did not sign this copy of the Book of Mormon.

Marginal Annotations

If the forged signature displays a general hint of Elvis, the marginal annotations throughout the Book of Mormon in the Church History Library demonstrate almost no resemblance to authentic samples of Elvis’s handwriting. As his biographer Peter Guralnick noted, Elvis “never kept a diary, left us with no memoirs, wrote scarcely any letters.”²⁴ Authenticator Bill White characterizes Elvis’s surviving handwriting as “somewhat erratic,” “jerky,” and “childish-looking.”²⁵ The most famous sample is a six-page letter penned to President Richard M. Nixon on December 21, 1970, that Elvis signed on multiple pages (figs. 4 and 5).²⁶

One annotation appearing near the end of the Book of Mormon volume used a word that Elvis did sign frequently. After the end of the main body of text in Moroni 10, a forged annotation reads, “Thanks Cricket!” (fig. 6). Elvis signed the word “Thanks” repeatedly, and many authentic samples exist. Elvis wrote a distinctive capital *T* that looked much like a 7 and connects to the rest of the word. As with the forged signature, the forged “Thanks” gets close to the flavor of the *T*, but its

22. White, “Collector’s Guide to Elvis”; Roger Epperson, email to Keith A. Erekson, October 17, 2018.

23. White, “Collector’s Guide to Elvis.”

24. Guralnick, *Careless Love*, xii; see also Peter Guralnick, *Last Train to Memphis: The Rise of Elvis Presley* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1994). For a brief introduction to the life of Elvis Presley, see Bobbie Ann Mason, *Elvis Presley*, a Penguin Life book (New York: Viking Penguin, 2003).

25. White, “Collector’s Guide to Elvis.”

26. Document R-013 re Elvis-Nixon meeting, White House Central Files: Subject Files: EX HE 5-1, Nixon Presidential Materials Staff, National Archives and Records Administration. To view the letter and be directed to an online exhibit about the visit, see <https://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/elvis-letter-to-nixon>. See also Epperson, “Elvis: The Later Years,” 82.

American Airlines
In Flight...
Altitude:
Location: ①

Dear Mr. President .
First I would like to introduce myself.
I am Elvis Presley and advise you
and have great respect for your
office. I talked to Vice Presidents
again in Palm Springs I understand
expressed my concern for our country
The Drug Culture, The Hippie Movement,
The SPS, Black & white, etc do not
concern me in their many or as they
call it the establishment. I call them dead

FIGURE 4. First page of Elvis Presley's handwritten letter to Richard M. Nixon, December 21, 1970. Courtesy National Archives.

American Airlines
In Flight...
Altitude:
Location: 5

~~approval~~
approval. I would love to
meet you just for my debt if
you is not to busy.
Respectfully,
Elvis Presley

P.S. I believe that you are
not one of the Top Ten outstanding men
of America also.
I have a personal gift for you also
which I would like to present to you
and you can accept it or I will keep it
for you until you can take it.

FIGURE 5. Fifth page of Elvis Presley's handwritten letter to Richard M. Nixon, December 21, 1970. Courtesy National Archives.

... grace of God are perfect in Christ,
and deny not his power, then are
ye sanctified in Christ by the
grace of God, through the ^ashed-
ding of the blood of Christ, which
is in the covenant of the Father
unto the remission of your sins,
y, see e, 3 Ne. 29. z, see f, 2 Ne. 2.
2 Ne. 2. 2c, Jac. 6:13.

and body shall again ^{2b}reunite,
and I am brought forth trium-
phant through the air, to meet
you before the ^{2c}pleasing bar of
the great Jehovah, the Eternal
Judge of both quick and dead.
Amen.
2a, see l, 2 Ne. 9. Rev. 2:7. 2b, see d,
ABOUT A. D. 421.

THE END

Thanks
Cricket!

FIGURE 6. Forged inscription in the Book of Mormon. Photograph by the author.

loosely spaced and smoothly curved “hanks” differs markedly from Elvis’s tightly spaced and rougher rendering.²⁷ Beyond the errors of the forged handwriting, the signature and note of thanks are out of place stylistically—if the book had been gifted to Elvis, and if he were actually studying it, he would not have signed it like a check, nor would he have written a thank you note in preparation to return the gift.

Elvis Presley was a reader and a book annotator, and several samples survive of his handwriting in the margins of books.²⁸ His daughter has observed that the books in his personal collection are “covered with his notes. He wrote on the top of the page, on the bottom of the page, in the margins—everywhere.”²⁹ All of the authentic samples reveal the same pattern—Elvis customarily underlined with heavy, crooked lines and wrote in block print letters (fig. 7).

Among the surviving books with authentic annotations are also a few Bibles. One Bible that Elvis marked in 1959 contains an inscription to his recently deceased mother and annotations in several places throughout.³⁰ Another Bible that was recently displayed in the Museum

27. Several authentic examples of Presley’s “Thanks” are reproduced in White, “Collector’s Guide to Elvis.”

28. For my analysis, I examined authentic marginal annotations reproduced in David Ritz, ed., *Elvis by the Presleys* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005), 114–15; and Guralnick and Jorgensen, *Elvis: Day by Day*, 198 (which features undated annotations in a book titled *Through the Eyes of the Masters*, a page of which is visible online at “Elvis Presley’s Books,” Graceland: The Home of Elvis Presley, September 3, 2015, <https://www.graceland.com/blog/elvis-presleys-books/>). I also examined an annotated copy of *The Impersonal Life*, visible at “The Auction at Graceland, March 4, 2017,” lot #122, Graceland Auctions, http://auction.graceland.com/elvis_presley_owned_and_heavily_notated_copy_of__e-lot2135.aspx, and viewed pages from Elvis’s marked copy of Vera Stanley Alder’s *The Initiation of the World* (1968), 94–95, which is on public display at Graceland in the *Archives Experience* exhibit, and two other samples provided for reference by Graceland Archives in LaVonne Gaw to Jeff Anderson, November 7, 2002.

29. Lisa Marie Presley, quoted in Ritz, *Elvis by the Presleys*, 111.

30. A photograph of Elvis’s inscription about his mother is reproduced in Martin Beckford, “Elvis Presley Wrote ‘I Love Ya Mama’ on Bible after Mother’s Death,” (*London*) *Telegraph*, May 12, 2010, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/celebritynews/7715059/Elvis-Presley-wrote-I-love-ya-mama-on-Bible-after-mothers-death.html>. Photographs of internal pages are reproduced in Jennifer Harper, “‘Sing for the Glory of God’: Museum Highlights Elvis Presley’s Personal Bible,” *Washington Times*, August 16, 2017, <https://www.washingtontimes.com>

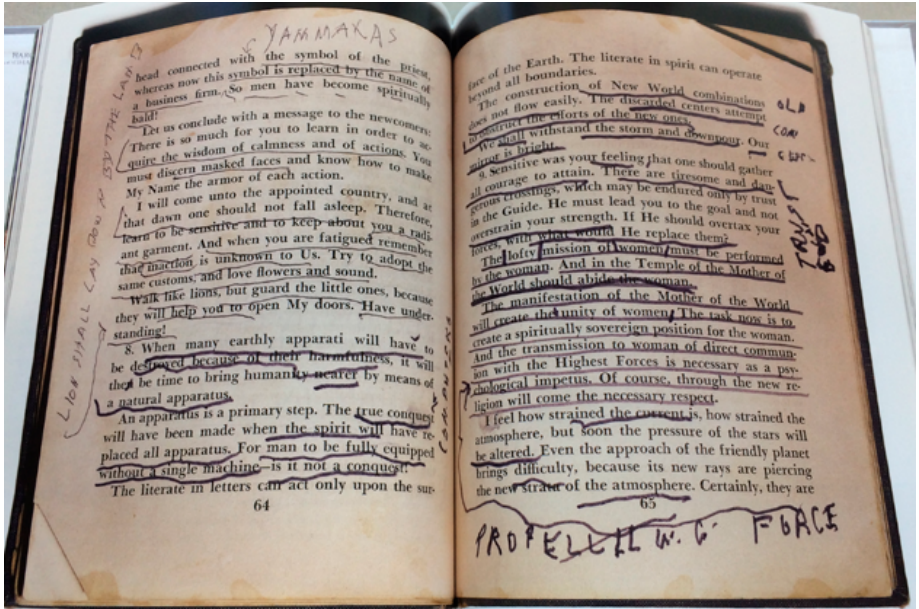


FIGURE 7. Authentic annotations by Elvis Presley. Reproduced from David Ritz, ed., *Elvis by the Presleys* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005), 114–15. Photograph by Keith A. Erekson.

of the Bible in Washington, D.C., bears annotations in several places, but primarily in the book of Psalms. A third Bible, currently on public display at Graceland, is open to Revelation 10–13 and contains annotations about numerological interpretations of the symbols in the text. In all of these Bibles with authentic annotations by Elvis Presley, he wrote in block letters—printed and all caps.

By contrast, none of the annotations in the Book of Mormon in the Church History Library are made in block letters (fig. 8). Further,

[.com/news/2017/aug/16/sing-for-the-glory-of-god-museum-highlights-elvis-;](https://www.independentjournal.com/news/2017/aug/16/sing-for-the-glory-of-god-museum-highlights-elvis-/) and Tre Goins-Phillips, “You’ve Gotta See Elvis Presley’s Handwritten Notes in His Personal Bible: ‘Sing the Lord’s Praises,’” *Independent Journal Review*, August 15, 2017, <https://ijr.com/youve-gotta-see-elvis-presleys-handwritten-notes-personal-bible-sing-lords-praises/>. See also Anthony Bond, “Elvis’ Bible Containing Handwritten Notes by the Star Expected to Fetch Thousands at Auction,” (*London*) *Daily Mail*, August 15, 2012, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2188891/Elvis-bible-containing-handwritten-notes-star-expected-fetch-thousands-auction.html>.

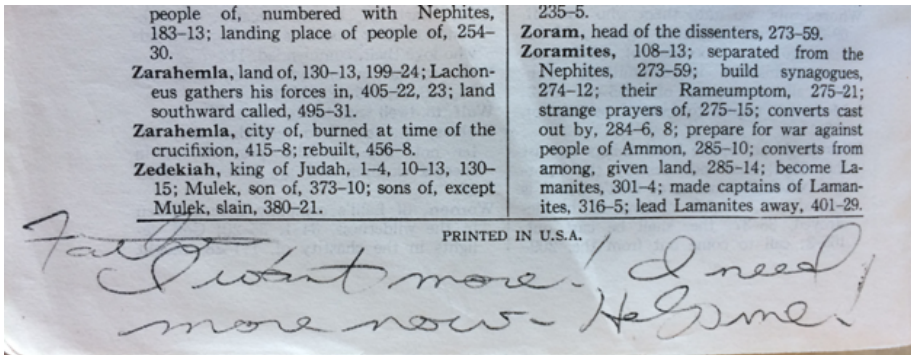


FIGURE 8. Forged annotations in the Book of Mormon. Photograph by the author.

comparisons to his handwriting in the Nixon letter show stark differences. For example, in the Nixon letter the capital *I* looks like a curved 7 with a loop, and in the Elvis Bible it looks like a block *I*, but it looks like an “ampersand” in the forged Book of Mormon annotation. Whereas Elvis’s authentic handwriting is rough script or squared print, the forged script annotations are so smooth, so “mature,” and so legible that they are clearly a forgery.³¹

Beyond the mechanics of handwriting, the content and style of the forged annotations in the Book of Mormon differ from authentic annotations. In Elvis’s authentic Bible annotations, his words frequently repeat words in the text. For example, in Psalm 11 he underlined the words “In the Lord put I my trust” and wrote in the bottom margin, “IN THE LORD I PLACE MY TRUST AND HE WILL GUIDE ME.” He underlined the words “Be still, and know that I am God” in Psalm 46:10 and wrote in the margin, “BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD.” Next to Psalm 118:8, which reads, “It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man,” he wrote “TRUST IN THE LORD NOT MAN.” His authentic annotations emphasized the words in the printed text, serving as a form of visual index by which to find a page of interest.³²

In contrast to Elvis’s known practice of emphasizing the printed text, the forged annotations in the Book of Mormon present a dialogue-like

31. White, “Collector’s Guide to Elvis.”

32. See a photograph of the annotation of Psalm 11 in Harper, “Sing for the Glory of God”; summaries of the other passages appear in Goins-Phillips, “Elvis Presley’s Handwritten Notes.”

engagement with and extension of the text in a way that appears forced at best and tongue-in-cheek at worst. For example, the forger underlined passages about excessive drunkenness (2 Ne. 15:11) and King Noah's whoredoms (Mosiah 11:2). Beneath a photograph of an ancient gold tablet, the smooth-handed forger wrote, "gold records—real ones." Underlining "Thou shalt have no other God before me" (Mosiah 12:35), the forger wrote, "Fans = Not me either." But the forger also wanted readers to see a change in Elvis's heart. Underlining Alma's warning to his sexually promiscuous son Corianton about unpardonable sins (Alma 39:6), the forger dialed up two ampersand *I*'s to write the book's longest annotation: "I could never deny that which I know in my heart to be true." Yes, there was still hope for Elvis. Next to the underlined words "They were desirous to be baptized" (Mosiah 21:35), the forger wrote "me too." But these forged desires would not come to pass, as the forger suggested that Elvis seemed to know all too well. Next to the underlined words "And now I go unto the father" (3 Ne. 18:35), the forger wrote "me too." If this imagined Elvis had a premonition of his own imminent death, he also found hope for the future in the most widely quoted forged annotation—beneath an underlined warning from Mormon that "awful is the wickedness to suppose that God saveth one child because of baptism" (Moro. 8:16), the forger wrote, "My Lisa needs this church. She's only 9. Help her for me."³³ The annotations in this volume are fabrications manufactured to deceive.

Forgeries are often accepted because they provide something that people already want; in this case, the story of a changed heart, the conversion of a celebrity, and a testimony of the Church. Latter-day Saints are not the only fans of Elvis Presley who have looked for themselves in his image. In an insightful analysis of Elvis fan culture, Notre Dame Professor of American Studies Erika Doss observed that "fan understandings of Elvis's religiosity generally correspond to their own particular religious persuasions"—Fundamentalist Christians cite his Pentecostal upbringing, gospel albums, and Bible literacy; others highlight his spiritualist seeking among New Age philosophies. One of Presley's secretaries reported that "Mormons sent literature and books to Elvis, Jehovah's Witnesses mailed issues of the *Watchtower* to him, and

33. The forged annotation about Lisa Marie Presley has been cited in Stack, "Elder Elvis?" C1; McCord, "Movie Shows Spiritual Side of Elvis"; Hardy, "Film Explores Elvis-LDS Link"; Hardy, "'Tears of King' Shows Spiritual Side of Elvis."

he received copies of the Living Bible and dozens of other Bibles in the mail from people who asked that he read them. (When stories circulated that he was losing his eyesight, someone sent him a Bible in braille.)” Nor are Latter-day Saints the only religionists to tell a story of Elvis’s near-deathbed redemption. One of Presley’s backup singers, Joe Moscheo of the Imperials, reported giving a Bible to Elvis in May 1975 with the sales pitch that it contained “all of the answers you’re looking for.” Moscheo also reported that televangelist Rex Humbard told Elvis of receiving a witness that Elvis would yet receive “a spiritual experience that will cause you to lead thousands of people to the Lord.”³⁴ Many people hoped for a religious Elvis, and for Latter-day Saints the forged annotations in this volume answered that longing.

EXTERNAL AUTHENTICATION

After drawing my own conclusion that the handwriting in the Book of Mormon was not made by Elvis Presley and receiving encouragement from handwriting experts in the Church History Department, I submitted writing samples independently to five Elvis Presley authenticators. I shared the signature from the book’s first page and 17 annotations that included the 14-word declaration of nondenial (Alma 39:6), the 5- and 7-word plea for Lisa that spreads across two pages (Moro. 8:16), the 10-word plea for more on the last page of the volume (see figure 8), and other samples of 5 words (2 samples), 4 words (3 samples), 3 words (2 samples), 2 words (5 samples), and 1 word (1 sample).

All five authenticators are unanimous in declaring the signature and annotations to be the work of someone other than Elvis Presley. Two of the authenticators could not speak on public record because of their respective employment at an auction house and a private archive. The official authentication service of Elvis Presley Enterprises, Graceland Authenticated, hosts a two-tier process designed to identify authentic

34. Erika Doss, *Elvis Culture: Fans, Faith, & Image* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 107; Becky Yancey and Clifford L. Linedecker, *My Life with Elvis* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1977), 270; Joe Moscheo, *The Gospel Side of Elvis* (New York: Center Street, 2007), 127, 128. Ed Parker rejects the Humbard story in Ed Parker, *Inside Elvis* (Orange, Calif.: Rampart House, 1978), 131–32. For an example of an evangelical author finding an evangelical Elvis, see Gary Tillery, *The Seeker King: A Spiritual Biography of Elvis Presley* (Wheaton, Ill.: Quest Books, Theosophical Publishing House, 2013).

Presley materials to sell at auction. Their analysts terminated after the first tier, responding, “we do not feel that authentication is possible at this time (or the value of the item does not warrant authentication).”³⁵

Roger Epperson is a collector, dealer, and autograph authenticator who specializes in the music industry. In addition to his own business, he served or serves as the music autograph authenticator for numerous authentication services and auction houses, including Christies UK and Heritage Auctions. On an episode during the tenth season of PBS’s *History Detectives*, he exposed forged autographs purported to be by Beatles John Lennon and Ringo Starr. And he is a regular contributor to *Autograph Collector*, including the already-mentioned historical analysis of Elvis Presley’s signature. After reviewing the eighteen samples from the Book of Mormon in the Church History Library, Epperson wrote: “In my opinion this is not written or signed by Elvis. The signature has some similarities to an authentic signature, but the writing is not really even close.”³⁶

Rich Consola is a collector, authenticator, and owner of Elvis Presley Authentication, who specializes in the autograph and handwriting of Elvis Presley. A 2012 write-up in the *Heritage Magazine for the Intelligent Collector* noted that he “began collecting Elvis memorabilia about two decades ago” and “today, he’s known in the collecting community as a specialist in authenticating Presley items.” Consola wrote: “After reviewing the signature of Elvis Presley and all the writing in this book, it is my opinion that NONE of the writing and the signature are that of Elvis Presley. To this end I am very certain.”³⁷

35. Graceland Authenticated, email to Keith A. Erekson, November 16, 2018. For information about Elvis Presley Enterprises’ authentication process and objectives, see Graceland Authenticated, <https://gracelandauthenticated.com/>.

36. Roger Epperson, email to Keith A. Erekson, October 17, 2018. See also Epperson, “It’s Good to Be King,” 54–59; Epperson, “Elvis: The Later Years,” 80–84; and “Credentials,” Real: Roger Epperson Authentication Ltd., accessed November 29, 2018, <https://rogerepperson.com/credentials.html>.

37. Moseley, “Collecting Elvis,” 49; Rich Consola, email to Keith A. Erekson, October 10, 2018, emphasis in original. See also Anne Neville, “If You Need an Expert on Elvis Presley’s Autograph, Head to Amherst,” *Buffalo (New York) News*, May 22, 2016, <https://buffalonews.com/2016/05/22/if-you-need-an-expert-on-elvis-presleys-autograph-head-to-amherst-3/>.

“TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS IN A FLASH”

Elvis Presley adopted as a personal motto the no-nonsense phrase “Taking Care of Business in a Flash.” He named the band that supported him during the last decade of his life the TCB Band and placed the letters “TCB” and a flash of lightning on the tail fin of his airplane and personal jewelry. In this spirit, the results of this historical and handwriting analysis can be stated quite clearly: Elvis Presley did not write in the Book of Mormon held by the Church History Library. The story of the book’s provenance—its being given to Elvis fourteen days before his death and being read and digested from first page to last—does not fit within the constraints of a period in which he hosted his daughter, prepared for a tour, and responded to an exposé about his prescription drug abuse and erratic behavior. Further, analysis of the handwriting in the Book of Mormon volume—a signature and three dozen smoothly written annotations—reveals dramatic departures from Presley’s authentic handwriting as well as differences in the style of his marginal annotation. After nearly three decades of uncertainty, this investigation can turn on the popular culture public announcement system to declare without hesitation: “Ladies and gentlemen, Elvis has left the library.”

If Elvis did not write in the book, then who did? Unfortunately, it is easier to disprove the writing of a single individual than it is to identify the writing of one of potentially millions of living persons. One might look to the handwriting of the obsessive superfan who followed Elvis across the country and back, but the way she signed “Cricket” and wrote “Presley” inside the front cover (see figure 1) differs from the forged inscriptions within the volume (compare figures 3 and 6). Differences between the sixty-eight words in Coulter’s inscriptions and the 103 words of annotations within the volume are likewise visible in several other instances, including *want*, *it*, *my*, *and*, *be*, and *for*. No, the evidence in the book does not suggest that the “quiet fan” became an open forger. When I presented the findings to her, Cricket expressed surprise and embarrassment, but then restated her story of the book’s provenance, which places it outside of her possession when the annotations were written.³⁸ Several questions remain: Would anybody in Graceland have had the knowledge (and motive) to make such forged and facetious annotations? Would Vernon Presley have returned a book

38. Cricket Coulter Harris, phone call with Keith A. Erikson, November 9, 2018.

with a forged signature and visibly fake annotations to Cricket on the day after Elvis's funeral? Did Cricket quietly modify her handwriting to create something she wished were real? Did she advise an acquaintance about what to write? What happened to the book between 1977 and 1989? Did the book begin as a book with no actual association with Elvis, or was it a book that was in his collection and sold without notice at auction during the 1980s? For now, these questions together with the big question about the forger's identity come back unanswered; much like the love letters in Elvis's song "Return to Sender," they have been marked "No such person, no such zone."

Where does this verdict of forgery leave Elvis Presley's relationship to the Church and its members? Elvis was a seeker who read the Bible, sang gospel music, wondered about the purpose of life, missed his deceased mother, and explored many philosophies and religions, striking up conversations with his maid, his hair dresser, and anyone else who would talk.³⁹ Elvis's best documented Latter-day Saint friend was his karate instructor and later bodyguard, Edmund Kealoha "Ed" Parker. Presley's biographer observes that Ed, a BYU sociology graduate, developed a form of kenpo (multiple martial arts) that fascinated Elvis, and the pair "spent time out by the pool, talking about karate and the Islands, about Parker's royal Polynesian heritage and his Mormon beliefs."⁴⁰ In a memoir written shortly after Elvis's death, Parker defended Presley against the charges made by the other bodyguards and reported giving Elvis a copy of the Book of Mormon, which they discussed, and he related tales of talking with Presley about life, death, resurrection, psychic healing, UFOs (both claimed to have seen one), indigenous ancestors (Parker's in Hawaii and Elvis's among the Cherokee), proxy temple work, numerology, end times, and island Kahunaism. For his part, Parker downplayed Elvis's interest in the occult and New

39. See Guralnick, *Careless Love*, 173–225; Rooks and Cox, *Inside Graceland*, 25; Larry Geller and Joel Spector with Patricia Romanowski, *If I Can Dream: Elvis' Own Story* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989).

40. Guralnick, *Careless Love*, 73; see also 296–97, 626 (visits to Hawaii); 73, 316, 363, 445, 491, 497, 498, 530–32 (karate studies with Parker); 546, 549, 550 (karate film with Parker); 355–56, 393, 540, 542 (Parker and the Las Vegas shows). Guralnick and Jorgensen, *Elvis: Day by Day*, 154 (first meeting of the pair on May 12, 1960), 262 (demonstration together on August 15, 1969), 263 (karate lessons on November 7, 1969), 277, 292, 293, 304, 324, 337 (demonstration together on July 4, 1974); photographs of Parker appear on 337 and 378.

Age religion, observing, “Elvis used to frighten some of his Christian friends when he would talk about concepts like transcendental meditation, Zen Buddhism, reincarnation, numerology and the occult. Elvis wasn’t a convert to these far-out doctrines; he simply had an inquiring mind.” The last statement about not being a convert but only an inquirer also aptly summarizes Elvis’s relationship with the Church. In all, Parker was perhaps most proud that Elvis incorporated karate moves into his onstage performances.⁴¹ In this case, the martial art proved more visibly influential than the message, but, as Elvis sang in his first hit recording, “That’s All Right.”

Elvis also made connections with the Church and its members through his work. His 1966 film, *Paradise, Hawaiian Style*, was filmed at the Polynesian Cultural Center in August 1965 (fig. 9). The center had opened in 1963 and is featured twice on screen—first as the main character (Elvis) flies his helicopter over the PCC, lands in the Tongan village, and rides a canoe through all of the villages while singing; later, as the film ends with Elvis singing a reprise of two songs from the film on the stage of what is now part of the Hale Aloha theater.⁴² Presley was also acquainted with the Osmond family, sharing the same drummer and jumpsuit designer in Las Vegas. Mother Olive Osmond gave Elvis

41. Parker, *Inside Elvis*, 131, 138, see especially 131–52. See also Leilani Parker, *Memories of Ed Parker: Sr. Grandmaster of American Kenpo Karate* (Pasadena, Calif.: Delsby Publications, 1997); Paul Skousen, “Friend Tells of LDS Influence on Elvis,” *Daily Universe*, January 30, 1978. Elvis gave Parker a white, four-door Fleetwood Brougham de Elegance Cadillac, and Parker’s daughter Darlene reports that the pair drove the car from Las Vegas to the Parker home overnight, stopping to visit the early-morning seminary students in the South Pasadena 2nd Ward on Huntington Drive in South Pasadena, California, around 6:30 in the morning. Darlene places the event in the spring of 1973, after Elvis’s *Aloha* concert. Parker did not date the event in his memoir but mentioned Elvis feeling generous after a Las Vegas doctor had treated his throat. Elvis was ill and performing in Las Vegas on March 6–14, 1973. Guralnick and Jorgensen, *Elvis Day by Day*, 321–22; Parker, *Inside Elvis*, 125–27 (photograph of the car on 124); Darlene Leilani Parker Tafua, quoted in Parker, *Memories of Ed Parker*, 103–4.

42. See “Presley Thrills Fans in Laie as He Appears for Movie,” *Ke Alaka’i* (BYU–Hawaii), September 24, 1965, 2; Mike Foley, “MPHS, LCA and BYUH History Department Sponsor ‘Movie Night,’” BYU–Hawaii Newsroom, November 27, 2006, <https://newsroom.byuh.edu/node/102>. See also Guralnick, *Careless Love*, 207–12; Jerry Hopkins, *Elvis in Hawai’i* (Honolulu: Bess Press, 2002), 49–60; Jerry Hopkins, *Aloha Elvis* (Honolulu: Bess Press, 2007), 59–68.

a Book of Mormon, and he gave the Osmonds flowers in the shape of a guitar. Elvis and Olive talked by phone about his mother and the purpose of life, and his sudden death preempted a barbecue he had scheduled with the family.⁴³ When I shared the findings of forgery with Alan Osmond, he was both surprised and saddened. Cricket Coulter had given the book to him and personally certified its authenticity. Over the past thirty years, he had told the story in fireside talks, on his website and blog, and in media interviews.⁴⁴ Though clearly a



FIGURE 9. In the film *Paradise, Hawaiian Style*, Elvis rides a canoe past the island villages of the Polynesian Cultural Center while singing “Drums of the Islands,” a song originally written by Fijian musician Ratu Isireli Racule, who later joined the Church. Courtesy of BYU–Hawaii Archives.

victim of the forger, Alan quickly recognized the strength of the evidence and said, “The Church is true, and it doesn’t need Elvis’s name. I am thankful that you have checked this out. We want to put closure on this.”⁴⁵ To me, Alan provides an inspiring example that it is okay to change one’s view when new evidence is uncovered.

What about other stories regarding Elvis and the Church that circulate amongst the Saints? One lesson to learn from this forgery is not to draw conclusions that reach beyond the evidence. For example, just because someone gave Elvis a Book of Mormon does not mean that he read it; and just because he read a copy (or marked it) does not

43. Alan Osmond, phone call with Keith A. Erekson, October 17, 2018; Osmond with Romanowski, *Life Is Just What You Make It*, 168–69; see also Stack, “Elder Elvis?” C1; and Arave, “Elvis Almost LDS?”

44. Alan Osmond, “Elvis Presley’s Writes a Note to ‘Help His Daughter Lisa!’” *The Family* (blog), February 6, 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130704184121/http://thefamily.com:80/2011/02/06/elvis-presleys-writes-a-note-to-help-his-daughter-lisa/>, as archived on 2013-07-04. Alan Osmond’s website elvisbofm.com told the story of the book, presented a copy of Cricket’s certification of authentication, and hosted photographs of some of the forged annotations. Fifteen iterations of the site are preserved in the Internet Archive’s “Wayback Machine” at <https://web.archive.org/web/20071016205932/http://elvisbofm.com>.

45. Alan Osmond, phone call with Keith A. Erekson, October 17, 2018.

mean that he believed it and desired baptism. Both Ed Parker and the Osmonds gave copies of the Book of Mormon to Elvis and reported discussing the text with him. To date, every claim of an active full-time missionary teaching Elvis has turned out to be false—the missionary did not serve in the right mission, or served in the right mission at the wrong time, or the missionary name did not even exist.⁴⁶ Former Latter-day Saint missionary Mike Corfield claimed to have given Elvis a Book of Mormon (documented with a photograph) and invited him to church when Presley was filming *Blue Hawaii* (1961) on the island of Kauai. Former Polynesian Cultural Center cast member Bobby Kauo claims to have given Presley a book and introduced concepts from the missionary lessons in a conversational way during the week he spent at the Polynesian Cultural Center on the island of Oahu filming *Paradise, Hawaiian Style* (1966).⁴⁷ Again, Parker provides an important check against overspeculation: Elvis “often told people what he thought they wanted to hear; not in attempt to be dishonest, but simply in an attempt to be accommodating.”⁴⁸ Thus, when a video published by the Graceland Archives reveals a paperback copy of the Book of Mormon among Elvis’s books, what does it mean? It means simply that a copy made it into his collection. Are there annotations? Yes, but not in Elvis’s handwriting (most likely by a missionary). Did Elvis read it? We can’t be sure. Did he believe it? The book won’t reveal that.⁴⁹

Finally, what about those who have been uplifted by the story of Elvis’s annotations, which now turns out to be false? Some, like the television station that prompted my inquiry into this subject, might want to ignore the evidence and continue telling a story that makes their hearers feel good. Others, like websites that cater to living Latter-day Saints, might want to qualify these findings as only “likely” being a forgery

46. Brad Hardisty, missionary research conducted in 2004–2005, November 17, 2018; Christine T. Cox, personal research notes.

47. Susan Wood, “Riverton Man Gave Elvis a Book of Mormon during Filming of ‘Blue Hawaii,’” ABC4 Utah, September 19, 2006. KSL News, “Fact or Fiction? Mormon Stories and Urban Legends,” 6:15–7:24; Katie Lambert and Jannalee Rosner, “Former Missionary Says He Taught Elvis the Discussions,” *LDS Living*, accessed November 29, 2018, <http://www.ldsliving.com/What-You-Didn-t-Know-About-Elvis-and-the-Polynesian-Cultural-Center/s/82276>.

48. Parker, *Inside Elvis*, 132.

49. Tom Brown with Angie Marchese, *Gates of Graceland—Unboxing Elvis’ Books* (Elvis Presley Enterprises, 2016), 4:14–4:54, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VF_MXLUjsXE.

or by placing a question mark after the article's title. A wiser approach will be to learn the lesson of seeking corroboration before passing on tales that seem too good to be true. Beyond the general fact that the annotations in this volume are forgeries, tellings of the story also accrued additional exaggerations over time, such as that Elvis spent months with the book (it was allegedly two weeks), that he'd underlined "king" throughout the volume (it was underlined once in the book's introductory pages), that it was his first copy of the Book of Mormon (it would have been at least his fifth), that he had wished that Priscilla would read it (the annotation mentions Lisa), and that he had written "There is only one King" (no such annotation).⁵⁰ The last three errors originated in a single volume marketed to Latter-day Saint readers as a "Mormon bathroom reader"—providing pungent reminders that you *should* judge a book by its title and that you get what you pay for. If you rely on the stories of celebrities to strengthen your conversion, then you face the possibility of later getting "All Shook Up."

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50. Arave, "Elvis Almost LDS?"; McCord, "Movie Shows Spiritual Side of Elvis"; Paul B. Skousen and Harold K. Moon, *Brother Paul's Mormon Bathroom Reader* (Springville, Utah: Cedar Fort, 2005), 46.