Representing Culture: Reflexivity and Mormon Folklore Scholarship

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REPRESENTING CULTURE: REFLEXIVITY AND MORMON FOLKLORE SCHOLARSHIP

by

David A. Allred

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

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This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by a majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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When writing about a culture, ethnographers can convey important insights about society. However, ethnography can also misrepresent culture. To address this fact, reflexive ethnography attempts to influence both the methodology and the rhetoric of writing about culture. Reflexivity seeks to acknowledge the bias of the researcher to include the voice of the cultural insiders and to more closely represent the dynamics of cultures that always have an element of hybridity. However, reflexive ethnographies can also be unwieldy and impractical. Therefore, one must find a pragmatic application of reflexivity.

Reflexivity can have application to Mormon folklore studies. The most important Mormon folklorists in the mid-twentieth century were Austin and Alta Fife, and their folklore research includes the ethnography “A Mormon from the Cradle to the Grave,” a
non-reflexive text that both reveals and conceals aspects of Mormon culture. Analyzing the Fife’s world view and the context that surrounded the production of their research helps reveal why their writings describe Mormon culture the way they do. Such a project also assesses their work in a reflexive way as it reveals researcher bias and includes more cultural voices.

William A. (Bert) Wilson took the Fifes’ place as the preeminent Mormon folklorist, and his work provides a more complete cultural description. He moves past the Fifes survivalist mode to a functional description on Mormon culture. He also combines an insider perspective with his functionalism. Such a shift focuses more on cultural context and does a better job at representing culture. In these aspects, Wilson’s work is a step towards reflexivity.

Reflexivity, however, could play a greater role in the work of Mormon folklorists. Wilson has called for modifications in the study and writing about Mormon folklore. He has argued that much of the past work misrepresents Mormon folklore by ignoring the more common stories in favor of the supernatural. His urging to modify the type of lore that is collected and analyzed will make Mormon folklore more reflexive. The researcher focus will be closer to what the culture itself is like. Reflexivity could also come about by adopting more reflexive methodologies, like those advocated by Elaine Lawless. Finally, Mormon folklorists can also make sure that all voices are heard in the complex subcultures of Mormonism.
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Finally, I want to acknowledge my own academic debt to both Austin and Alta Fife and William A. (Bert) Wilson. They have inspired my own scholarship.
If we can agree with John-Paul Sartre when he says that a new anthropology will have arisen when we realize that "the questioner, the question and questioned are one," then I would argue that the way forward . . . begins by looking backwards to the multivocal traditions in which we are inevitably embedded and forward to possible new modes of relating to the social world, in which, for better or worse, we find ourselves.

—Paul Rainbow, "Masked I Go Forward: Reflections on the Modern Subject" 185.

There is . . . a need for studies of those who have contributed to the literature on Mormonism. . . . How did they become interested in writing . . . about the Mormons? What familial, intellectual, and other influences colored their opinions and analyses? Here are topics for many master’s theses and journal articles.

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Chapter 1

Reflexivity, Rhetoric, and the Value of Postmodern Ethnography

Elaine Lawless has argued that beginning in the 1980s some scholars in folklore and anthropology have been dealing with "a most critical question." That question is "How do we write ethnography, and how does the ethnographer acknowledge her/his role in the field situation?" (Holy Women 58). Such questions are searching when one considers the implications of the subjectivity of perspective, the influence of bias, and the perils of transforming life and human action to written signs on a page.

Ethnography, in its basic form, is the process of collecting, interpreting and reporting on information about a culture. The traditional model has an anthropologist (or someone else examining culture) traveling to a foreign culture, living with the people, learning the language, making copious field notes, and then, when the encounter was finished, writing those field notes into a formal ethnography, a document which presents a greater understanding of the culture in question. Lawless views ethnography as the "framing of cultural events" or a "description of people’s lives within a certain context" (Holy Women 75). Geertz also defines ethnography by pointing out that a useful
ethnography will be authoritative by its authenticity, which grows out of its ability “convince us . . . not merely that [the ethnographers] have themselves truly ‘been there,’ but . . . that had we been there we should have seen what they saw, felt what they felt, and concluded what they concluded” (16). In other words, effective ethnography shows real aspects of the culture it describes and makes it so the reader could have been among the culture him- or herself.

Even though some texts are strictly ethnography, many texts have an ethnographic function as they represent culture. In this sense, many works on Mormon studies have ethnographic tendencies. For example, many Mormon historians seek to capture and describe aspects of the Mormon cultural experience. A single example (among the many possible) of such an endeavor is *Nearly Everything Imaginable: The Everyday Life of Utah’s Mormon Pioneers*, which details what Utah culture was like in the nineteenth century. The book examines many cultural issues, including education, community ties, material culture, pioneer narratives, and the relationships of the Mormons with their neighbors. Although ethnography is not its primary aim (history would be the closer classification), it ably describes the culture of nineteenth-century Mormon Utah.

Some of the most important Mormon ethnographers include writers such as Nelson Lowry, Thomas O’Dea, and Jan Shipps. Each has produced influential ethnographies on Mormon culture. Lowry was a sociologist at the University of Minnesota. A Mormon, he wrote *The Mormon Village*, which examines why Mormon settlements were successfully established and what role the LDS Church played in the lives of those settlers. Another sociologist, Thomas O’Dea, tackled a larger area of
inquiry with *The Mormons*. In this book, he describes the 1950s Mormon culture in general. O’Dea, who was not Mormon or from Utah, lived in Utah to do much of his fieldwork and wrote a fairly objective assessment of Mormon culture. The strength of his book lies in the second to last chapter, where he identifies tensions in the culture that would pose future problems.¹ Finally, historian Jan Shipps is currently writing important descriptions of Mormon culture. Her book *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* has been well received for its analysis of Mormonism. In fact, Sterling M. McMurrin assessed the value of both Shipps works as well as O’Dea’s by writing that “anyone seriously interested in the Mormons should first read *The Mormons* by Thomas O’Dea, a brilliant Catholic sociologist of religion, and then Jan Shipps’s *Mormonism*, the work of another brilliant non-Mormon scholar. Taken together, they are the best thing on the Mormon religious movement” (130).² Each of these three scholars has, while not primarily trying to write ethnography, provided valuable descriptions of Mormon culture.

However, folklorists have also written Mormon ethnography. At times folklorists, especially those who concentrate on collections and archives, concern themselves with projects outside the scope of ethnography. However, whenever folklore is interpreted and presented, it becomes ethnographic in nature; the lore characterizes the beliefs, stories, and imagination of the people who make up the culture. This ethnographic function of folkloristics is an important aspect of the discipline, especially as the discipline moves...
further away from the text-oriented emphasis of the mid-twentieth century toward functional and performance-oriented emphasis.

Some of Mormon folklore’s early cultural descriptions begin with two researchers in Logan, Utah. Austin and Alta Fife were in many respects the founders of Mormon folklore as they traveled the Mormon cultural region collecting stories and songs. Although much of their work is focused on Mormon folklore texts, they did write several essays that describe Mormon culture, including a prologue to their *Saints of Sage and Saddle* titled “A Mormon from the Cradle to the Grave.” The work of another important Mormon folklorist, William A. Wilson, is also ethnographic in nature. For instance, Wilson’s “On Being Human: The Folklore of Mormon Missionaries” portrays what life is like for Mormon missionaries by examining the stories they tell.

In performing this ethnographic function, folklore studies, like any discipline, has rhetorical conventions that are mutually agreed upon audiences and authors. Forms of folklore’s ethnographic rhetoric are found in Mormon folklore’s writings, and this rhetoric is constantly changing. One of the purposes of this thesis is to track how the rhetoric of folkloristic ethnography has changed in its description of Mormon culture. The thesis will also propose reflexive rhetoric as a new theoretical guide to describing Mormon culture.

In the following pages, I will examine the rhetoric of texts dealing with Mormon

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3The term *Mormon folklore* needs clarification because it can mean several things—Mormons doing Mormon folklore research, Mormons doing general folklore research, or folklorists doing Mormon research. For this thesis, I will focus on the first and third definitions, that is, folklorists, Mormon or not, doing research on Mormon lore and culture.
folklore to point out the ways they represent or (and) distort Mormon culture. Chapter One lays the theoretical foundation for examining the ethnographic canon by discussing reflexivity and how it can promote more democratic and representative ethnographies. The next two chapters are justified by Jill Terry Rudy’s observation that “The study of Mormon folklore parallels in many ways the biographies of influential Utah folklorists” (2). Chapter Two examines the lives and work of Austin and Alta Fife, especially the rhetoric that they used to describe Mormon culture. Reexamining the Fifes’ work in the light of reflexivity shows how their work both reveals and conceals aspects of Mormon culture. Chapter Three looks at William A. Wilson and his contribution as the major second-generation Mormon folklorist. His rhetoric for describing Mormon culture approaches the lore functionally and has more of an insider’s perspective. The result is a corpus of folklore analysis that is more authentically Mormon. However, even Wilson’s work has not perfectly described Mormon culture, and he has called for changes to the ethnography presented in Mormon folklore scholarship. Chapter Four takes up Wilson’s concern by examining reflexivity in past works and by proposing ways reflexivity can be implemented in future Mormon ethnography to make it better represent aspects of Mormon culture.

In this thesis, one term has been used in a specific way, which needs to be understood before proceeding. I often write about “culture” and one could assume that by using that word, I mean a single, homogeneous group. Many popular conceptions of

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4When I use the term Mormon, the reader can assume that it refers to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the LDS Church). Other Mormon groups exist which separated from the LDS Church at various points in its history. However, I am looking at Mormon folklore from only one of the possible denominational perspectives.
Mormons assume such a stance. However, homogenizing Mormon culture brands all Mormons as identical, an impression that I obviously want to avoid. Instead, I like a caveat written by Jan Shipps that captures the complexity of Mormon culture well:

Mormonism is not as organized and systematized, logical and amenable to rational comprehension as it appears from the outside. Because it provides both religious and cultural identity, and thus serves as the ground of being for a whole people, an ambiguity inheres in Mormonism that blurs its institutional edges to allow the richness and diversity of the multi-dimensional LDS world to show through. (148)

Because of this complexity, I will use the word “culture” as William A. Wilson has explained it. Each person has a variety of “social identities” that overlap and contradict those of his or her neighbors. For example, Wilson has called himself a Mormon, a father, a teacher, a Democrat, an Idahoan, etc. (“On Being Human” 7), and as a member of various cultures, his identity is shaped by a combination of these cultural influences. In addition, he comes into contact with other cultural members who have other allegiances which make them vary in identity. Consequently, tensions and difference characterize a culture.

Mormon culture is made up of fathers, mothers, believers, nonbelievers, Republicans, Democrats, Tories. and other political parties of other countries, people who sing loudly, people who exercise regularly, vegetarians, and so forth. Although members of the Mormon culture share much, there are still a wide variety of differences. This thesis, especially the chapter on the Fifes. will highlight some of these differences.
Reflexive Theory

While doing fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands, Bronislaw Malinowski recorded that “experience in writing leads to entirely different results even if the observer remains the same . . . Consequently we cannot speak of objectively existing facts: theory creates facts” (114; italics added). Years later, Parssinen has used Malinowski’s words as an example of the angst of “translating experience into language” (214); the resulting knowledge always loses something in the translation. Such is the challenge of doing ethnography. Because there is no absolute objectivity, and because no perfect metalanguage exists to represent reality, descriptions of reality tend to be incomplete and biased. This point of view, however, finds itself in opposition to the principles of scholarship growing out of the Enlightenment, principles that suggest that scientific inquiry will result in truth and that language is a medium that connects truth with reality. These Enlightenment ideals have influenced much of the ethnographic canon.

Recently, however, reflexive anthropological theory has acknowledged the limitations of writing about culture, and the theory has redefined the methodology of ethnographic inquiry. Reflexivity has grown out of examining the rhetoric of ethnographic writing, and one of its primary aims is to place the author visibly in the authored text. Marcus explains that reflexivity is essentially “the self-critique, the personal quest” and that it “play[s] on the subjective, the experiential, and the idea of empathy” (“On Ideologies of Reflexivity” 193). The theories of reflexivity have implications for all areas of ethnographic research, from fieldwork methodology to publishing the results of ethnographic encounters, and disciplines like anthropology and
folklore studies feel the effects of reflexive theory.\footnote{Traditionally, folklorists spent much time collecting and cataloguing texts. Today one of the major trends in research is toward performance theory and contextual studies. A complete discussion of these trends is beyond the scope of this paper, but the reader is invited to see Jones's "Slouching Towards Ethnography" and "Dogmatism" and Ben-Amos. See also Zumwalt 138-44.}

Accepting theoretical reflexivity is often easy to do. yet doing so forces one to reject much of the objectivity that disciplinary authority is based on. In fact, reflexivity can be a form of deconstruction that attacks a disciplinary model. Completely accepting reflexivity can erode the researcher's ability to claim truth and representational reality. Thus, the question becomes: Can reflexivity, with its deconstruction of traditional methodologies, change the rhetoric of ethnography without eroding the authority necessary for the creation of knowledge (Marcus, "Rhetoric and the Ethnographic Genre" 166)? Admittedly, reflexivity brings with it challenges as it tries to improve ethnography. However, examining the implications of a reflexive rhetoric shows that the drawbacks are not as significant as the benefits. If it can be put into a more pragmatic form, reflexive ethnography can produce knowledge about culture with authority.

**Why Analyze Ethnography**

One might wonder about the purpose of examining the rhetoric of ethnography. Marcus points out that such an endeavor is valid: "A discussion of variations in ethnography's rhetorical style is just as important for assessing the strengths and limitations of any particular work as is an evaluation of its logic and evidence" ("Rhetoric and the Ethnographic Genre" 171). There are two important reasons why examining the rhetoric of ethnography is important. First, ethnographers have often focused on field
research without addressing the challenges of writing accurate, ethical, and marketable products of research. But, writing is essential in any ethnographic endeavor; Clifford points this fact out well in his introduction to *Writing Culture*: “Somewhere lost in his account of fieldwork among the Mbuti pygmies—running along jungle paths, sitting up at night singing, sleeping in a crowded leaf hut—[anthropologist] Colin Turnbull mentions that he lugged around a typewriter” (1). Observations have to be taken down as field notes and those field notes must be written up for academic presentation. The importance of this writing process has been glossed over in the emphasis on the ethnographic product—knowledge about culture. However, as Malinowski suggested, the cultural facts are at least influenced by the process of collecting and interpreting them.

Second, a rhetorical analysis of ethnography is important because of the power of the written word and the privileged position of the ethnographer. The ethnographer is often a cultural outsider, yet in Hufford’s words, the ethnographer has “the permission to define reality for others” (“The Scholarly Voice” 62). The “others” spoken of here are outsiders whose only knowledge of the culture may be a textual one. This textual reality is often at odds with the cultural reality in the minds (and experience) of a majority of cultural insiders. Further, the ethnographer’s goals and world view may be vastly different from the culture he or she is describing. The inherent result is that the ethnographer’s conclusions are presented as the objective truth, and, unconsciously or purposefully, the conclusions can silence the voice of the cultural insider. Because of the authority based in a published text, ethnographies can tout a form of reality that is in fact only a subjective observation. Examining ethnographic rhetoric is thus essential.
Classical Ethnography

Ethnographers may study culture, yet they are their own separate culture by virtue of their sharing a common vocation. Todorov has argued that a culture "chooses and codifies the [speech] acts that correspond most closely to its ideology" (19). and the ideology of twentieth-century ethnography has been influenced by the standards of scientific inquiry. Indeed, the scientist Franz Boas and his students were among the founders of twentieth-century anthropology and ethnography. Because ethnography has been highly influenced by this modernist faith in science, such a bias has helped form the disciplinary norms, assumptions and (most importantly for this study) rhetoric.

The ethnographies written this century have produced much cultural knowledge, especially about places remote and foreign. All of this knowledge, however, must be seen with its biases. Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo has critiqued what he calls "classic ethnography." His critique of ethnographic norms examines the traditional ethnographer, whose work finds inspiration in the Weberian model of professionalism, rigor, and objectivity. This model has become "an orthodoxy widespread in the social sciences that equates objectivity with an attitude of emotional disengagement, cognitive distance, and moral indifference" (170). Such a paradigm for ethnographic field work has produced ethnographies that present an etic (or outsider) view of culture. In such a rhetoric, the outsider's interpretations of what a culture values, how the culture works, and what the culture is and should be reigns. It is the voice that is heard or read.

The rhetoric of classic ethnography has several characteristics. For example, Bendix mentions the assumption of an evolutionary model in cultural description (113);
many ethnographies have the underlying assumption that the academic knowledge of the ethnographer grows out of his or her culture’s ascendency on the evolutionary chain. Such an assumption has roots in a time when ethnography meant a Westerner doing fieldwork among “primitive tribes” of unlettered “natives.” Such a rhetoric displays a culture “devoid of individualism” in contrast to the ethnographer’s culture which has “progressed to individualism and differentiation” (Bendix 113). Rosaldo identifies similar elements of traditional ethnographies: the subjects are robotic, without a history or future (Rosaldo 42). Rosaldo also points out that a “classic” text is also often written in the ethnographic present. Such a perspective depicts scenes in an ever present and unchanging reality (Rosaldo 48-49). The researcher may show skepticism about the beliefs of the culture (Rosaldo 52) and may distrust or explain away human emotion (Rosaldo 52, 53, 58): “The general rule seems to be that one should tidy things up as much as possible by wiping away the tears and avoiding the tantrums” (Rosaldo 15).

Further, the writing ignores or marginalizes personal narratives or case histories (Rosaldo 60). The researcher is detached not just emotionally, but also physically, as he or she watches from afar, taking into account the broad picture that the subjects supposedly cannot see. Finally, the scene is often male dominated; women are not noticed or discussed in the same manner as men (Rosaldo 43).

One final characteristic is a major one. Many ethnographies show no conflicts or hybridity in the monolithic culture (Rosaldo 208). However, cultural critics realize what a complex and dynamic creature culture is. Victor Turner is one critic who has worked in this area. He has called analyzed cultural conflicts, calling them “social dramas.” These
dramas consist of four phases: “breach, crisis, redress, and either reintegration or recognition of schism” (69). Even though these conflicts are apparent in any society, they tend to be neglected by some ethnographies: the totalizing scenes of such ethnographies do not portray the tensions found in culture.

These common aspects of ethnographic rhetoric can best be seen with a specific example. In her book, *In Search of Authenticity*, Bendix quotes from Hans Naumann’s description of the peasantry of Eastern Europe:

[O]ne does not have to leave Europe to find a living primitive communal culture. For instance in the European East, among the Lithuanian peasants, the notion of primitive communal culture is overwhelmingly driven home. . . . When the Lithuanian peasants drive to market in the next village, they go, one behind another like ants. And the outsider cannot distinguish among them. In addition to identical beards, identical hairstyle, identical clothes, there are identical types of faces and similar build. (qtd. in Bendix 113)

This example, which is so detached that even human identity is ignored, shows many aspects of the classic rhetorical norms of ethnography. First, as Bendix points out, it is based on an evolutionary model where the informants or subjects are less advanced than the researcher (113). Naumann’s rhetoric places him at a distance and disconnects him from common humanity. Most importantly, this ethnography leaves out key information: discussions of the motivations, beliefs, cultural assumptions, or conflicts. These “ants” are silenced and, in a sense, put in a petri dish for scientific consumption.

Of course this is an extreme example, but it is also subtle. Another example shows
the absurdity of such rhetoric more blatantly. In 1956, Horace Miner wrote a satiric ethnography of American culture and their hygiene practices. “Body Ritual among the Nacirema” is an example of how this detached academic stance can affect an ethnography. For example, Miner’s description of washing one’s face reads, “Beneath the charm-box [medicine cabinet] is a small font [sink]. Each day every member of the family, in succession, enters the shrine room [bathroom], bows his head before the charm-box, mingles different sorts of holy water in a font, and proceeds with a brief rite of absolution” (504). The classic ethnographic rhetoric here consists mainly of objectifying the ethnographic subjects so much that their culture is misrepresented. Miner writes about American culture in a way to squeeze them into the cliché of the superstitious natives with magical items of material culture. While the parody can be amusing, Rosaldo calls the article “a scathing critique of ethnographic discourse.” He contends that when ethnographers apply their detached methodology to a familiar culture it becomes unrecognizable and “ludicrous” (Rosaldo 51-52). Both the Miner and Naumann texts use a classic rhetoric, and each would differ if the culture being described would critique the ethnographic product.

It is important to note that Rosaldo has been criticized for his attack of classic ethnography. One book reviewer objects to Rosaldo’s “dismissing a half century of ethnographic texts.” Although the texts are written in “a mode admittedly limited and flawed,” they still contain important insights and research (Konner 1082-3). One must agree that it isn’t fair to expect an ethnographer from the early twentieth century to adhere to a 1990s methodology. In response to accusations like Konner’s, Rosaldo defends his
position by clarifying that he tries to “displace classic norms without discarding them” (102). The techniques exemplified in classic rhetoric can have use, but misused, they distort cultural descriptions. Therefore, the useful project becomes finding a way to respect past texts with their epistemic products without canonizing their arguments and information.

This thesis tries to find a balance in this regard. It will examine past ethnographies and suggest where they may fail to describe culture accurately. This enterprise is especially justified because these past ethnographies are still being read and viewed as definitive, even though they may not reflect all the aspects of dynamic and changing cultures. Texts are products of a certain time, but their existence also extends into the present. Since these texts are still artifacts available for study today, we would do well to critique them according to our own standards. By doing so, we can see strengths of the past work and improve on the weaknesses. Further, we can explore not only textual choices, but also changes in the culture that may have taken place. In essence, this process creates a Burkean parlor where ethnographers can converse about culture. A distinction must be made, then, between critiquing the products of fieldwork so that the inherent biases are made plain and faulting an anthropologist or folklorist for an unreflexive (and by implication, unprofessional) methodology.

**Pragmatic Reflexivity**

The negative characteristics of classic ethnographies are what reflexivity tries to temper, but reflexivity can also have negative characteristics. Forms of reflexivity tend to
use postmodern theory that distrusts language and the ideology behind its production. The effect of this postmodernism makes reflexivity resistant to codification or institutionalization. In the first place, strictly objective fieldwork would be impossible because “the general theory you take into the field leads you to select certain data for attention, but blinds you to others perhaps more important for the understanding of the people studied” (Turner 63). In written form, a completely reflexive text would become bogged down in qualifications and caveats because the author would have to account for how each interpretation shows his or her biases and selectivity. The author could not build off of any assumptions, but would have to qualify the meaning of every word, phrase, or trope (and then qualify those qualifications and so forth.)

In fact, the ethnographic text couldn’t even be written down because of the perils of translating actions into an arbitrary sign system. And even if a text appeared, it would have to be formless, because the physical appearance of a text grows out of the hidden ideology of the culture that sets textual conventions. For example, Edward Said has argued the relation between the novel and imperialism: “without Empire, I would go so far as saying, there is no European novel as we know it” (69). He continues, “I am not trying to say that the novel . . . ‘caused’ imperialism, but . . . imperialism and the novel fortified each other to such a degree that it is impossible. I would argue, to read one without in some way of dealing with the other” (70-71). Obviously, ethnography is not a novel, but the textual form of ethnography has also been influenced by outside forces. Pratt has pointed out how ethnographic form has been influenced by travel writing, for instance, in how it “subordinates narrative to description” (35). A completely reflexive
text would have to acknowledge influences like this and a myriad of others. In short, a purely reflexive text is impossible. Pursuing such a project would only doom the researcher into a downward spiral of self-introspection with no grounding in sight.

Therefore, one must find some sort of middle ground—a pragmatic reflexivity. Such a rhetoric of ethnography would allow folklorists and anthropologists to study, write about, and represent a culture without objectifying, marginalizing, and totalizing the people who become ethnographic subjects. Such a rhetoric would have to account for authorial bias and give a voice to everyone involved in the project, the researcher and the researched.6

One attempt to develop a pragmatic reflexive ethnography is Elaine Lawless’s “reciprocal ethnography.”7 Her methodology is best seen in her book *Holy Women, Wholly Women: Sharing Ministries of Faith through Life Stories and Reciprocal Ethnography*, a book that explores the lives of a group of Midwestern female clergy. The text includes an extensive life history of each woman and has a preface where Lawless describes her own world view. The chapters containing Lawless’s interpretations include the reactions of the informant women to her own interpretations. Although she falls into the criticism of “going native,” her book creates knowledge by effectively describing a

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6Viewing multivocality and dialogue as intrinsically positive ingredients in ethnography is an assumption I make, although it could be debated. For instance, one can argue that opening the door to any voice becomes so democratic that one can be inundated with so many perspectives that no perspective really matters. Further, listening and responding to every voice becomes a project so consuming that nothing else can be accomplished. Like reflexivity, multivocality needs to have a practical application and discriminations still need to be made.

7There are other instances of reflexivity in practice. See for example Steven Feld’s *Sound and Sentiment*. 
culture. (“Going native” is perhaps an unfair criticism because it denigrates the value of an insider’s perspective. Reflexivity embraces the “native” view.) Lawless builds her “reciprocal ethnography” on the approaches of Jeff Todd Titon, who advocates “formulating reinterpretations that are based on our informant’s interpretations of our interpretations” (Titon 13 qtd. in “I was afraid” 306; italics in original). Like Booth’s theory of coduction, Lawless’s process of reinterpreting and encountering other points of view can reveal new and otherwise hidden perspectives. In the following sections, which examine the objections to and benefits of reflexivity, Lawless’s work can provide useful examples of pragmatic reflexivity.

**Objections to Reflexivity**

Because any form of reflexivity produces its own set of challenges and drawbacks, even assuming that a pragmatic reflexivity could become a viable methodology, some would still object to the project. Although the limits of many traditional ethnographies are apparent, reflexive theory still elicits objections from folklorists, anthropologists, and others who study culture. The radicalness of reflexivity, even when tempered by its assumption of a pragmatic form, will elicit several objections: (1) reflexive ethnography involves a cumbersome methodology. (2) reflexive ethnography too often falls into a sort of autobiography instead of focusing on the informant culture, (3) reflexive ethnography erodes the norms on which past research has been built, and (4) reflexive ethnography will not satisfy an audience looking for an authoritative, traditional text. I will discuss each objection further below.
**Complex Methodology.** A major objection to reflexivity is that when put into practice, it can become an unwieldy process. To be reflexive, authors must let informants have a say in the text. Easy generalizations become descriptions of many points of view, and steps have to be taken to ensure the authorial bias is not covertly skewing assertions. In short, the author’s biases, world view, and interactions with the informants become part of the ethnography. Further, an author must show the process of writing not just the writing product. Lawless calls this showing one’s tracks (*Holy Women* 6). However, the cumbersome methodology can be justified through clarifying a researcher’s priorities. Lawless points out that “a neatly packaged product is not the goal . . . Our goal is understanding” (*Holy Women* 127). Thus if the cumbersome methodology redeems itself by the depth of cultural understanding it produces, the additional work may pay off.

**Autobiographical Genre.** A second objection to reflexivity is the tendency of the researcher, newly found among the “natives,” to displace the supposed subjects of the ethnography. Autobiographical ethnographies can be the result of reflexivity, and such ethnographies can alienate readers or hinder the production of knowledge. For example, Dan Rose’s description of the community of South Philadelphia is punctuated with excerpts from his poetry and a discussion of his childhood and his divorce. Such inclusions are desirable in a personal memoir, but Rose’s ethnography suffers by the frequent and lengthy diversions. Reflexivity can reveal the author so much that readers, especially readers expecting authoritative pronouncements of reality, will be confronted with, in Rose’s words, “the uncomfortable position of inadvertent voyeur” (228). Besides voyeurism, such ethnographies fail to focus enough on the culture and can struggle to
provide useful information and theories of cultural dynamics.

This objection to reflexivity is directed more to a tendency than to an essential ingredient in a reflexive text. An author can, to a useful extent, include how her own experiences affect the text without inserting excessive personal details. *Holy Women.* *Wholly Women* begins with a preface where Lawless acknowledges her own thoughts and biases in religion, the area of her inquiry. She explains that, “I do not explain this point of view to call attention to myself as the author of this work. . . . [However,] I cannot totally discount or eliminate my presence from this book” (xii). As the reader moves through Lawless’s work, he or she can more readily see that the book’s interpretations are not objective “truth,” but the interpretations of Lawless, an observer.

**Erosion of Norms.** Another challenge to reflexivity comes from those who object to how the theory erodes the norms of ethnographic discourse. The system of signs that make up our language is an arbitrary one, and thus we depend on a socially influenced language to communicate. This idea has application to ethnographic theory. What makes an authoritative text has evolved out of the world view and community standards of ethnographers. For example, the effort to cast folklore studies in a positivist model, with the objectivity and rigor of science, became a norm in the folklore discipline thanks in large part to scientific-minded leaders in the field like Franz Boas and his students. As a result, the community of folklorists recognized texts constructed along positivist norms as authoritative.

Reflexivity takes criticism because it erodes those norms of scientific, objective, and detached scholarship, a scholarship which has produced so much important
information on culture. Instead of a detached and educated observer analyzing data then revealing reality, reflexivity places the researcher in the midst of the observation as one of the participants. The researcher, with the informants, is influencing the results of an inescapably biased observation. The authority base of the detached scholar is eroded.

A reflexive scholar instead shares the authority to interpret phenomena with the informants or the cultural insiders. The reflexive scholar also admits that her or his biases will skew the data. Ethnographic knowledge then is not discovered as much as it is created. In short, a reflexive ethnographer stresses not only the ethno-, but also the -grapher because he or she must write, select, and present his or her own view of reality, a view that may be widely disparate from the claims, assumptions, world views, beliefs, customs, and imaginations of the members of the group written about.

This erosion of disciplinary norms is at the heart of reflexivity, but it doesn’t have to be a negative aspect of the theories. Methodologies are constantly changing to meet current needs. In effect, reflexivity is changing the hypothesis of scientific inquiry (an ironic perspective considering how reflexivity tends to attack the supposed scientific inquiry of ethnography). According to the scientific model, if a phenomenon does not support its hypothesis, the thesis should be modified. The prevalence of misleading ethnographies argues for a modification of the hypothesis that the traditional norms need no change. Reflexivity modifies the hypothesis by suggesting that the objective scholar, limited in his or her ability to produce valuable descriptions of culture independently, should include the voice of the cultural insiders, in their humanized and multivocal form. Such a proposition also opens the door for insiders to write about their own cultures.
**Reflexive Audiences.** There is another objection that grows out of the communal conventions of knowledge making. Even if a text is reflexive, it must have an audience that can deal with the ambiguity of reflexive texts. Such an audience will have to accept that reflexive texts are part of an ongoing conversation on a culture. Thus, a definitive text is theoretically impossible. Watson comments on the issue of a reflexive audience: “It is not enough that writers stop hankering after authority; it is also necessary that readers stop requiring authoritative accounts from writers” (36). For reflexivity to work, readers have to become accustomed to reflexivity and be less focused on the ethnographic product than the process of writing more descriptive ethnographies.

There is a final point to make about the dangers of reflexivity—a danger this thesis probably falls into. Marcus points out that there can be a condescending attitude that grows out of the conflict between reflexivists and traditionalists (if such a binary is appropriate): “In the current polemics about the use of reflexivity, one encounters . . . a frequent bad-faith, flippant dismissal of reflexivity, or, among those who favor it, competitive, ‘more reflexive than thou positions’” (“On Ideologies of Reflexivity” 190). Marcus implies that earnest and respectful debate on the merits and drawbacks of reflexivity is necessary, and my own discussion of the pros and cons of reflexivity is written to support this idea. There should be an open dialogue on the merits of reflexivity and on what to do to make it more pragmatic.

**Benefits of Reflexivity**

In addition to the above warnings, adopting a more reflexive approach to
ethnography has several distinct advantages: reflexivity enables ethnographies to (1) include the voice of informants, (2) include more voices in order to show a complex culture, (3) be more ethical in their portrayal of other humans, and (4) create dialogue on what cultures are like. These benefits can modify the foundation of texts and create a space for improved ethnography. I will address each of these topics below.

Finding a pragmatic version of reflexive theory has the central benefit of being a constructive endeavor while, at the same time drawing from some of the useful aspects of deconstructive and postmodern theory. Postmodern theorists, especially those concerned with ideology (for example, Michel Foucault), argue and press for less hegemony in cultural structures, an argument that aids reflexivity. However, some poststructural theory, like extreme applications of the idea of language as a prison, works against reflexive aims because it discredits any attempt to understand others through language. Goodheart points out that those who accept a breakdown of dialogue resulting in individual contingency and linguistic isolation “have trouble entertaining the possibility of a shared humanity that transcends cultural difference” (27). To achieve the benefits possible from reflexivity, one must maintain the possibility to dialogue as well as the possibility of understanding others through that dialogue.

**Adding the Voice of Informants.** One major advantage of reflexive ethnography is the way its methodology opens up space for the voice of the informants. In describing culture, the subjects of research have less power because they are not the authors. However, the insider voice has inherent authenticity and therefore authority. Reflexivity includes the additional insider authority by finding ways to include the interpretations of
many. Consider how Lawless’s interpretations of her subjects’ life stories takes a
reflexive form, a form unlike the classic norms.

Originally, I was stymied by the stories, by the ways in which they did not, in fact,
follow the expected patterns and content I’d been led to believe would
characterize the way women live their lives and tell stories about them. . . . But as
Kathleen [one of Lawless’s informants] points out, “what’s there is what I’ve been
able to resolve.” Which leaves me dissatisfied, then because the looming question
is, of course, what have they not resolved? That seems to be the key to
understanding where a “woman in ministry” finds herself today. (Holy Women 73)

Lawless writes with an involved perspective; she is positioned among the inhabitants of
her ethnography. Lawless’s methodology not only admits bias in the researcher, but also
ignorance—sometimes data doesn’t neatly fall into step with hypotheses. She also
augments her own views on life stories with the views of Kathleen, thus acknowledging
that “They know themselves far better than I can presume to know them” (Holy Women
4).

Some may question the role of the ethnographer in a rhetoric like this. Does he or
she become just a recorder of what the culture says about itself? In rebuttal, Lawless
defends including the voice of the insider:

I have not relinquished my role as interpreter, as thinker, as objective observer.
But I have given up the notion of scholar voice as privileged voice, the scholar’s
position as more legitimate because it is the more educated or more credible one. .
. No one gets the “last word”; we merely share the opportunity to speak directly
to the reader. (“I was afraid” 312-313)

What reflexivity proposes is a collaborative enterprise where ethnographers and subjects define, classify, observe, and report culture. An open project like this creates more complete ethnographies because answers come out of debates shown in the text. Rosaldo summarizes this concept with a suggestion: “We should take the criticisms of our subjects in much the same way that we take those of our colleagues” (50).

Multi-Perspective Approach. In a reflexive ethnography, not only is the informant voice present, but many informants’ voices can be present. The drawback of many ethnographies is that the ethnographer presents the culture as a monolithic mass. The subtleties, conflicts, and diversity in a culture can be lost in the process of making tidy conclusions or seeking some sort of broader pattern (Rosaldo 217). An ethnography that can capture divergent and conflicting positions is more realistic of what the culture is like. Rosaldo explains, “Social analysts should explore their subjects from a number of positions, rather than being locked into any particular one” (169).

Lawless’s work utilizes this polyphonic approach. For example, chapter 7 of Holy Women, Wholly Women consists mostly of the dialogue of the ten female clergy involved in her study. Instead of summarizing and further entextualizing the interactions of her informants. Lawless highlights the personal interactions and gives a greater feel of the subtleties of being in the culture. The rhetoric is more complex, but has advantages. Such an involved rhetoric can build textual authority, not by giving the definitive treatment of a culture, but by raising questions and showing conflicts in the culture. The ethnography will become more authentic and more useful: it may not answer all the questions, but it
will identify deeper and more meaningful questions to explore with the help of informants.

**Ethical Relationship with the Other.** Reflexive ethnography is also inherently more democratic and more inclusive than other types of ethnography. In it the author no longer has the sole responsibility or privilege of deciding how a culture is represented. In effect, a reflexive text seeks to promote dialogue which entails listening to the voice of the other. Levinasian theory provides a unique view of the ethics of reflexive ethnography by emphasizing the primacy of the interpersonal relationship. Levinas writes, “Society does not proceed from the contemplation of the true; truth is made possible by relation with the Other” (72). To be ethical in Levinasian terms, an ethnographer must engage and interact with the Other without violence and aggression. Fulfilling this criteria, reflexivity is ethical in that it doesn’t seek to totalize the voice of the Other. In many ethnographies this totalization comes from the researcher assuming scientific authority to define a culture. Instead, reflexive ethnography comes, in effect, face to face with the culture. The researcher is clearly among the people, listening to the people, and conversing with the people. In reflexivity’s polyphony, the face of the Other is apparent and approached instead of being the muted object of inquiry.

**Giving a New Voice to Past Studies.** Finally, one of the major objections to reflexivity can actually be turned into an advantage when doing reflexive work. Some object to reflexivity on the grounds that it is a debunking exercise: a reflexive ethnographer attacks past studies for their myopia. It is true that reflexivity grows out of problems associated with the canon of ethnographic literature: it “depends on preexisting,
more conventional narrative treatments and is parasitic on them” (Marcus, “On Ideologies of Reflexivity” 197). However, one could view reflexivity’s critique of past research as part of a larger dialogue, not on texts, but on culture. Because ethnographic texts written years ago can be read in the present, there must be some sort of evaluation of the context on the piece, at the very least of the date of research. Reflexivity takes this critique one step further by looking at the rhetoric of past texts as well as what they say about a culture. Ideally, a reflexivist would approach a past text with the humility that grows out of reflexivity’s claim that no text is complete and no description of culture is unsituated, even his or her own. In this spirit, the following chapters will critique past texts of Mormon ethnography, including those written by Austin and Alta Fife and William A. Wilson.

Conclusion

The action of writing about culture is a process of invention. One can never expect to definitively describe any culture for two reasons. First, the position of ethnographer places the researcher in the culture and therefore as a biased participant. There is not an all-encompassing view of culture to take, and each researcher will see a culture differently. Second, every culture is constantly changing in the face of competing ideologies, personalities, environmental conditions, and a myriad of other factors. Reflexivity tries to reform the methodology and rhetoric of ethnography because of factors like these. Yet this effort can be difficult. Marcus has summarized this work in postmodern ethnography as juggling “the liberating techniques and cognitions of a
modernist sensibility and the continuing desire to report objectively on a reality other than the anthropologist’s own” ("On Ideologies of Reflexivity" 184). Still, in the midst of this struggle, ethnographers can develop pragmatic methodologies that draw from the benefits of reflexivity and minimize its drawbacks.
Chapter 2

Austin and Alta Fife: A Reflexive Reading of Foundational Mormon Folklore Scholarship

In May 1950, Austin Fife wrote to the Mormon Church’s headquarters asking for a recording of several LDS hymns, which he planned to use in lectures he was giving in France as a Fulbright scholar. The request was forwarded to the Church Radio Committee, and the committee’s executive secretary responded in June of the same year, explaining how the Church was reluctant to help him because of how his past work had represented Mormonism. The letter reminds: "To you these things may be folklore; to those who have . . . made great sacrifices because of their beliefs they are sacred truths" (Hinckley 2). Although apparently the committee did provide the recordings, the letter made it clear to Fife that the committee "certainly [did] not think that the so-called folklore which [he had] published in the past represent[ed] an accurate or true picture of

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8 An early version of this article was given in February 1999 at the Association of Mormon Letters Conference held at Westminster College, Salt Lake City, Utah. This earlier version was published in The Association of Mormon Letters Annual, 2000. Ed. Lavina Fielding Anderson. Salt Lake City: Association for Mormon Letters, 2000. 44-48.
Mormonism" (Hinckley 2).

Austin Fife responded by saying he was pleased "that this correspondence has opened up the opportunity to clarify some misunderstandings concerning [his] studies in Mormon folklore" (Fife, Letter to Gordon B. Hinckley 4). In the process of this "clarification," Fife objected to "the dialectical view that all that is not wholly in favor of Mormonism is against it," a position that "leaves no ground for the objective student who is not concerned with either proving or disproving Mormonism but of describing it" (Fife, Letter to Gordon B. Hinckley 4). In the following pages, Fife explains his Mormon studies position, a position ruled by his role as an objective scholar. In fact, several times he makes statements designed to show that others fault him for being too sympathetic to Mormonism: "Recently a rabid anti-Mormon took me to task because I seemed to be favorably disposed in one of articles [sic] toward a group that he considered vile" (4).

Whether or not others viewed Fife’s work as pro- or anti-Mormon, above all, what Fife seems to value is the freedom to interpret culture without having to placate non-academics among the religious culture he is describing.

The example of this correspondence highlights one of the inescapable facts of writing about culture. Because the observations are written and disseminated, there is always an audience. And because there is an audience, the ethnography will be evaluated. What makes the situation more complex is the reflexivity that arises as the culture itself reads and interprets what interpretations have been made about it. As shown above, such a process can cause conflict. Both the Church Radio Committee and Austin Fife were influenced by inevitable human bias. The Fifes and every other member of the Mormon
culture perceive Mormonism in sometimes subtle and sometimes vastly different ways, and these perceptions affect how each person would describe Mormon culture. This problem posed by inherent subjectivity is ignored by many traditional ethnographies.9 The identification of this conflict points to the need of methodologies and theories that seek to address the problems associated with textual representations of culture. Theories of reflexive ethnography are seeking to do this.

As noted earlier, Marcus has pointed out the "parasitic" nature of reflexive ethnographies ("On Ideologies of Reflexivity" 197); they need earlier models to modify. Rainbow takes this point up when he advocates examining past texts and the possible revisions of them:

If we can agree with John-Paul Sartre when he says that a new anthropology will have arisen when we realize that 'the questioner, the question and questioned are one,' then I would argue that the way forward . . . begins by looking backwards to the multivocal traditions in which we are inevitably embedded and forward to possible new modes of relating to the social world, in which, for better or worse, we find ourselves. (185)

As an exercise of "looking backwards," this chapter will analyze how the Fifes' world view influenced their ethnography. A textual analysis of some of their most important Mormon ethnography follows and shows how their rhetoric both reveals and conceals aspects of reality as it exhibits some of the characteristics of classic

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9See Geertz 11-16. Hufford shows that much of academia is biased against folk belief and how this bias influences ethnography in "Traditions of Disbelief," 47-55.
ethnographic rhetoric. Austin and Alta Fife’s Mormon ethnography shows a real, yet one-sided, view of Mormon culture, partly because it carries an air of finality and definitiveness that disregards other perspectives. Instead, reflexive ethnographies, like the ones Elaine Lawless’s work suggest, will encourage dialogue on culture and enable the Mormon ethnographer to better represent Mormon culture.

**Austin and Alta Fife: Founders of Mormon Folklore**

One can easily argue that Austin and Alta Fife were the most important Mormon folklorists (that is folklorists doing research on Mormon material) before 1970 and that they founded the subdiscipline of Mormon folklore. They worked closely with other eminent folklorists such as Wayland Hand, one of the most important scholars on folk belief, and Hector Lee. In fact, Austin, Lee, and Hand were known as the Three Nephites of Mormon folklore. Others including Kate Carter, Lester Hubbard, Thomas Cheney, and Olive Burt were also doing important work in Mormon folklore; however, the Fifes’ work was preeminent.10

They also worked at the same time as others who were doing Mormon ethnography in their own disciplines. As mentioned in Chapter One, Thomas O’Dea and Lowry Nelson also wrote about Mormon culture in the Fifes’ time period. In fact, they all published their most important books on Mormonism within a few years of each other: *The Mormon Village*, 1952; *Saints of Sage and Saddle*, 1956; and *The Mormons*, 1957.

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10 Wayland Hand had a greater national reputation, but the focus of much of his work was not on Mormon material.
Still, they all took a different approach to describing Mormonism. O’Dea’s work focuses on, among other things, doctrine, social concerns, and conflicts in the culture. On the other hand, Nelson’s writings address the settlement of the Great Basin and the community structure in those small towns. At the risk of being reductive, one way to distinguish their works is to say that O’Dea’s work is Salt Lake City oriented, while Nelson’s focuses on the outlying settlements. Such a distinction is not without its exceptions, but it does give a sense of their differences. In comparison with the work of these two scholars, the Fifes’ work approaches Mormon culture in yet another way—through looking at its folklore texts.

Working as a team in both their fieldwork and writing, Austin and Alta Fife worked among an obscure cultural group (in academic circles) and proved that Mormon culture had much to offer a folklorist. William A. Wilson pointed out that the Fifes "were attempting to demonstrate that the stories, songs, and customs they had collected were not just curious novelties of little consequence, as some believed." They were trying to show that "From studying this lore, one could, indeed, learn a great deal about mankind" ("Austin and Alta Fife" 2). Not only were they pioneers in Mormon folklore, but they also contributed heavily to the study of Western songs, and they influenced the study of material culture with their book, *Forms upon the Frontier*, co-edited with Henry Glassie.

Among their works on Mormonism, they published the most important book of Mormon folklore to date, *Saints of Sage and Saddle*, along with numerous articles on

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11 The most obvious contradiction to this paradigm is Nelson’s objections to the Church policy on blacks and the priesthood, a concern that O’Dea also deals with in his writings.
topics ranging from a ballad about the Mountain Meadows Massacre ("A Ballad of the Mountain Meadows Massacre") to a discussion of the Mormon identity compared with the American identity ("Folk Elements in the Formation of the Mormon Personality").

Perhaps one of their most lasting accomplishments will be the establishment of the Fife Folklore Archives at Utah State University, which houses their massive folklore collection and makes the materials available to new generations of folklorists. Austin revealed what a resource the archive would be with: among other things, its thousands of 4 x 6 cards recording the folklore the Fifes collected. Austin revealed: "I could launch a student on any one of a hundred Ph.D. dissertations by saying 'There are the cards. Now take off from there'" (Wilson, Interview).

The Fifes' subject matter, ideology, and theoretical approach were consistent with the academic norms of folklore scholarship in their time. Much of the Fifes' work deals with marginal parts of Mormon culture: Three Nephites. J. Golden Kimball, and controversial aspects of the culture. These topics are similar to the contents of a 1959 volume of *Western Folklore* devoted to Mormon lore. One issue included articles entitled "Militant Songs of the Mormons." "The Ecclesiastical or Bishop's Court," and "Murder Ballads of Mormondom" (Table of Contents v).

Further, the Fifes' theoretical background was also similar to their colleagues. Much of their work is very text-centered. The result is that much of their work is only marginally ethnographic. For example, much of *Saints of Sage and Saddle* recounts the

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12 For a bibliography of all of Austin's publications on Mormonism (many which include Alta as co-author), see the appendix.
legends and stories of Mormonism without trying to draw cultural interpretations of the role of the texts in the culture. Further, the Fifes based much of their work on a conception that the "folk" were a rural, less-educated, and superstitious culture. Such an idea prevailed from early European folklore studies and influenced folklore conceptions until recently. The combination of the textual approach among the "folk" makes much of the Fifes' work an exercise in survivalism. They collected, among the rural and less-literate, the folkloric remnants of an earlier time. Such remnants, from this perspective, were quickly disappearing with urbanization and education.13

Understanding how the Fifes fit into their own time period enables us to look more deeply at how their assumptions and authorial biases affected the way they described Mormon culture. Before examining the Fifes’ world view, it is important to note that throughout this chapter, I refer to them as a unit although I recognize Austin's and Alta’s separate identities. Regrettably, many of the biographical examples deal with Austin alone, solely because he received more credit for their work and his journals and correspondence were available. In my frequent discussions of Austin, I do not wish to minimize the contributions of Alta to the Fifes' folklore legacy.

The Fifes' World View

In 1972 Austin Fife spoke with William A. Wilson about the writing of Saints of Sage and Saddle and said that "the thing had to write itself" (Wilson, Interview). Of

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13 One the clearest evidences of this idea of the "folk" is found in Hector Lee's assertion that Three Nephite stories were dying out. See Lee: Wilson has argued that Lee's prediction has not come to pass, and in so doing he argues for new conceptions of the term "folk." See "Mormon Legends" 5.
course, Fife’s statement has to be taken figuratively, because every text has an author that influences the shape of the text, and the author cannot be taken out. Identifying the ways the Fifes, as authors, reflect the values of their ethnography is a profitable exercise from a reflexive standpoint. Because the Fifes are no longer doing ethnography, it is impossible to see how they would write reflexively, and it is also difficult to recreate their "tracks," the process of writing their ethnography. Still, one can better see the context out of which the Fifes’ ethnography was written by examining their world view. *Saints of Sage and Saddle* may have written itself, but Austin and Alta were intimately connected to the form of the final product.

As mentioned before, the Fifes’ scholarship occupies an important position in the history of Mormon folklore and ethnography. The husband and wife team were among the first scholars to seriously collect and interpret Mormon folklore, and they "brought Mormon folklore to the attention of the scholarly world" (Wilson. "In Memoriam" 289). In effect, they became Mormon spokespersons. To be sure, proselytizing was not on their agenda, but their work did represent Mormon culture to a wider culture. Austin recounted that "my lectures have almost universally left listeners with a feeling of respect, sympathy and understanding [of Mormons] that they never had before" (Fife, Letter to Gordon B. Hinckley 5). However, their place within the culture they speak for is ambiguous because they can be seen as both cultural insiders and outsiders.

*Cultural insider* is a difficult term because of its situated nature. Elaine Lawless saw the Fifes as Mormon insiders, but William A. Wilson disagreed (Wilson, “Folklore, a Mirror” 14). I use the term to denote a participating or committed Mormon, one who not
only knows about the subtleties of Mormon culture, but one that is mainstream in his or her feelings about and affiliation to the culture. Of course, what should be called mainstream could be debated.

Both Austin and Alta were raised as cultural insiders. They were born into Mormon families and were raised among Mormons. Austin even served an LDS mission in France from 1929-32. He and Alta met while attending Utah State University, a university with a predominately LDS studentbody, and the couple lived in Logan, Utah, for much of their adult lives. This Mormon background aided them in their fieldwork among Mormons. Alta recounted in an interview, "Austin and I were both raised in the Church so we know the vocabulary and the whole background. We knew what to avoid and what to ask about" (Hatch 43). In this sense, the Fifes were cultural insiders because of their Mormon immersion (both ritually through baptism and culturally through environment).

Still, despite their Mormon roots, they spent most of their lives outside the mainstream of Mormon culture. In letters written during his mission, Austin told of how he had begun to doubt the Church as he grew up. "I could see that my childhood illusions were weakening and, as a naked person tries to hide his nakedness, so I left Logan [for a mission] in order to hide my disillusionment" (Fife, Missionary Journal, 181-82). In France he writes that "I became more sceptical [sic] every day and felt it a hopeless effort to even try to believe in ‘Mormonism.’ That attitude continued until I thought I was the most loathful hypocrit [sic] in the world" (Fife, Missionary Journal 182). Austin admitted in letters that he never had "a testimony." We know less about Alta’s beliefs about
Mormonism, but we can assume they were similar to her husband's. In 1972, Austin admitted to William A. Wilson that he and his wife "still cherished their Mormon heritage," but that "they had turned increasingly toward humanism for their spiritual sustenance" ("Folklore, a Mirror" 14). Alta told Annie Hatch that she and her husband "had stopped going to the Mormon Church entirely" (Hatch 41). In the end, Wilson observes that "anyone who reads Saints of Sage and Saddle as a book by Mormon believers reads it wrong" ("Folklore, a Mirror" 14).

One of the most distinguishing concepts in the Fifes' world view is their belief in humanism, and the humanism that the Fifes espoused was based on the Western model of scientific inquiry. Austin compared his humanism to a sunrise, saying that "the unilluminated recesses of [his] soul" were rescued by the "inviting brightness" of humanism ("Folk Elements" 1). In the same speech, Austin confirmed that his approach to folklore combined "the Mormon myth system and the humanistic tradition of France" (5). Although he had a dual emphasis, his academic training influenced him more. This can be seen in how humanism influences the ethnography in "A Mormon from the Cradle to the Grave." For example, the Fifes gently mock Mormon culture for dismissing

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14 Kurtz provides a good discussion of humanism in the context of Mormon studies. He associates humanism with "a sense of freedom" and characterizes humanists as those who "defend the values of the free mind, free inquiry, and free thought" (xviii). Kurtz continues his discussion of humanism: to humanists "belief should not simply be a question of faith or dogma, emotion or intuition, custom or authority, but should be guided by informed judgment, an appeal to evidence and logic, and tested in practice" (xxii).

This humanistic tradition is also evident in the ideology of several of the prominent members of the "Swearing elders," a Mormon study group in Salt Lake City that ended right before the publication of Saints of Sage and Saddle. See Blakely 8-13 and Reynolds 24-26. The main difference between the "Swearing elders" and the Fifes was that the Fifes wrote about Mormonism, but had severed all ties to the Church religiously, while many of the swearing elders were still participating in the religion. For example, O.C. Tanner wrote a Sunday School manual for the Church (Reynolds 44, n99).
science: "Mormon theologians have evolved theories of an ever-expanding universe far more poetic and conceived in infinitely greater detail than by theoretical physicists" (12).

Much can be said in favor of the rich store of knowledge and academic rigor that the "humanistic tradition of Europe" gave to Austin. However, this humanism also biased his world view against experiences that lay outside of the tradition. He viewed the goal of liberal or humanistic education as being the effort to "liberate the mind of man by exposing it to all of the great lines of thought." These ideas are those "which have played a guiding role in the civilizations of man" ("Folk Elements" 12). This transcendental aspiration contrasts with what Fife saw as misdirected learning: "[limiting oneself to] understanding . . . the cosmology of a single cultural group" (Fife, "Folk Elements" 12). The implicit assumption of such reasoning, and a false assumption, is that being a humanist enables one to transcend human bias. that being a humanist makes one immune from the influences of culture. In reality, Austin's training placed him in yet another "cultural group" that also biased his approach to belief studies. Hufford has addressed one aspect of the bias that academic training can give when scholars deal with issues of belief: "the tendency to count disbelief as the 'objective' stance is a serious, systematic bias that runs through most academic studies of spiritual belief" ("The Scholarly and the Personal Voice" 61). Part of reflexivity is presenting the biases that are inherent in approaching a culture from a certain perspective.

In spite of their distance from Mormonism, the Fifes were, in another way, part of the Mormon culture they described. Austin and Alta were part of a larger movement of Mormons who were among the first large group from Utah to be trained in universities
outside of Utah. Many of these individuals are placed within the "Lost Generation" of Mormon studies.

The term "Lost Generation" was first applied to Mormon studies by Bruce Jorgensen in a discussion of those Mormon fiction writers who felt they had to leave Mormon culture to pursue their work (Jorgensen, "Digging the Foundation" 58). The comparison, of course, is to the American writers of the 1920s who felt "a spiritual alienation from a country [America] that seemed . . . hopelessly provincial and emotionally barren" ("Lost Generation" 696), a definition that compares nicely to the way their Mormon counterparts have been described. Edward Geary picked up on Jorgensen's use of the term and wrote a detailed analysis of writers who met the "Lost Generation" criteria (23-33). The term became a permanent fixture in Mormon literary criticism when Eugene England institutionalized the term by including "Lost Generation" as one of his four historical periods of Mormon studies (469-71).

Those grouped under this "Lost Generation" heading include historians Juanita Brooks and Fawn Brodie; novelists Maurine Whipple, Vardis Fisher, and Virginia Sorensen; and folklorists Austin and Alta Fife and Wayland Hand. The academics and artists of this movement dealt with issues of Mormon culture and doctrine in ways that gained increasing national attention but alienated readers at home (England, "Mormon Literature" 469). Elsewhere, England has described well the tone of the Fifes' "A Mormon from the Cradle to the Grave" by observing that "Lost Generation" writers were

15 Eugene England has published at least two versions of this article. I cite the one in Mormon Americana for ease of reference.
often "guilty of a certain patronizing tone" and that they ironically exhibited "their own quaint forms of provincialism, in their reaction against Mormon provincialisms" ("We Need to Liberate" 161).

Like other "Lost Generation" scholars, the Fifes, on occasion, found themselves at odds with the official church. For example, in 1946 Austin was invited to write a folklore article for the *Utah Humanities Quarterly*, but when the article was finished, the journal's "advisory council became aware of its content and a protest was presented to the University [of Utah] from a spokesman from the Church offices" (Fife, Letter to Dale Morgan 1). Eventually, Fife withdrew his article and published it in the *Journal of American Folklore* under the title "Folk Belief and Mormon Cultural Autonomy." He added a concluding paragraph to "express a protest against the forces of Mormonia which do not tolerate published objectivities pertaining to the sacred rituals and lore of Mormonia" (Letter to Dale Morgan 3). The paragraph reads:

> The integrity of the philosopher and the objectivity of the man of science are in Utah as a thin crust over a pie of spiritualism and propitiatory ritual still hot from the oven. Humanists and scientists of Mormonia are compelled to either bury their ideals in speechless serenity or to resort to a fantastic set of mental calisthenics in order to appear to accommodate their beliefs to the spiritualistic impulse of their environment. Failing this, they must depart from Zion to take refuge among the Gentiles, for the time has not yet come when they may aspire to become prophets in their own land. (Fife, "Folk Belief" 30)

16For a deeper discussion of this incident, see Peterson 183-84.
Elsewhere, Austin expressed benevolent feelings toward Mormonism, but situations like the one described above also characterize his relationship to the Church, and, given the academic climate among Mormon intellectuals of his day, such a relationship was not uncommon.

On the whole, the Fifes exemplify the "Lost Generation" attributes in their faith and academic work, but such a classification, while being reflective, is also deflective. Like many labels, the "Lost Generation" tag hides the individuality of its members and tends to marginalize the scholars as outsiders. For example, Juanita Brooks was a believing Mormon who wrote about difficult Mormon issues, yet she suffered alienation for her work. Wayland Hand is also misrepresented by the "Lost Generation" label because, although he had Mormon roots, much of his scholarship had little to do with Mormonism.

By placing the Fifes in a renegade group of scholars, one disregards the advantage one might have in being both a cultural insider and outsider. Some ethnographers feel that such a "bicultural" individual has claim on being an "epistemological amphibian" and is thus able to see clearly both the culture that he or she is studying and the culture which is outside (Aguilar 20). The argument can be made that a "Lost Generation" scholar/amphibian may be able to do a better job and contribute much to the vision of mainstream culture.\textsuperscript{17} This dual perspective probably contributes to the worth of the Fifes' work.

\textsuperscript{17} Aguilar continues to discuss the amphibian metaphor pointing out that other ethnographers hold that "unless the bicultural individual can effectively compartmentalize each of the two insider perspectives, each will function to block the other." Then that ethnographer, instead of being "stereoscopic" would have "double vision" (20).
ethnography. However, because of its non-reflexivity, their work has limitations. Still, the "Lost Generation" tag clouds the issue.

Further, by invoking the "Lost Generation" label, one is in danger of a harmful binary—that scholars are either in the church or outside it. Who and who isn’t an insider in the Mormon culture is a difficult and ultimately unproductive question. It presupposes the false idea of a monolithic Mormon identity with uniformity in belief and practice. In reality, every Mormon’s identity contains a mix of orthodoxy and individuality. Further, acting as a judge of others’ spiritual beliefs and adherence to the standards easily becomes Pharisaic. Instead of pigeonholing the Fifes as outsiders, listening to their perspective and comparing it to the perspectives of others is, in the end, the more productive ethnographic exercise.

The most acceptable objection against the Fifes has more to do with their methodology than with their relationship with the Mormon church. Their ethnographic work fails to let a range of Mormon voices speak, especially the more orthodox or committed voices. Instead, the Fifes interpret what the Mormon experience is like. They do this assuming a scientific objectivity—they are not "tainted" by the belief in the spiritual and provincial aspects of Mormonism. The Fifes seem to miss that "What is increased objectivity to the outsider . . . is increased risk to the insider (Hufford, "The Scholarly Voice" 62). The modernist climate of scholarship in which the Fifes published was hardly accepting of religion, especially one that was provincial, obscure, and full of supernatural explanations. Their humanistic world view hardly would account for a sympathetic reading of the culture.
In the end, the Fifes should be seen as neither ethnographers who disliked their informant culture nor ethnographers who "go native" and accept wholesale the culture they describe. Perhaps two statements best summarize how the Fifes stood in relation to the culture they described. First, the Fifes themselves explain the relationship between their religious and academic perspectives by saying, "Our roots are in the soil of [Mormon] culture, however much they may have been nourished by a mulch from the humanistic tradition. This work is an effort to cultivate the plant, not to uproot it" (Saints xii; italics added). Second, when asked what would be his "most significant contribution to the study of folklore in America," Austin replied "I think I have inspired a few people to look objectively at their own culture without any sense of humiliation. . . . Juanita Brooks paid us a very nice compliment recently when she said, 'Austin has made us see things we hadn't seen before in our own culture'" (Wilson, Interview) The Fifes' folkloristics are best viewed, not as an attack on Mormons and their culture, but as a scientific endeavor to describe Mormon culture without the bias of the religion, using the benefits (and the biases) of modern, humanistic training received at universities.

Reflections and Deflections

Understanding the context that the Fifes' ethnography grew out of, one can more productively look at the rhetoric of that ethnography. "A Mormon from the Cradle to the Grave" is the Fifes' most ethnographic article and so the focus will be on that text. Written as a prologue to their nationally published book of Mormon folklore, Saints of Sage and Saddle, the essay serves as an introduction to Mormon culture and is written to
an audience who may know little about Mormon culture. In the essay, the Fifes both
describe and decry Mormon culture. Kenneth Burke’s theory of terministic screens
explains why this dual result occurs. No one perspective can contain all truth. In using
language, a symbol system, one attempts to describe reality using arbitrary signs, and
since reality is so vast, one can only describe portions of it. Therefore, when one directs
attention to an aspect of reality, one inherently ignores other aspects of reality. Burke
writes: "Even if any given terminology is a reflection of reality, by its very nature as a
terminology it must be a selection of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a
deflection of reality" (45; italics in original). Each view on Mormon culture, including the
Fifes’, is necessarily biased and selects only some of the information. It follows that by
putting multiple perspectives together, the reflections and the deflections, more insight
can be found. Adding a unique perspective is one role the Fifes perform for Mormon
ethnography.

Two of the many areas in which the Fifes seem to critique Mormon culture are on
the topics of missionary work and prayer. They use a mock heroic tone to describe the
mission experience and life journey of a Mormon. The satire invoked in the mock heroic
grows out of treating a common subject in an overly grand way. In this case, the satire
develops as the missionary service of Mormons becomes a call to war. The Fifes show a
missionary leaving on a hero quest: an elder leaving for the mission field is a "warrior
[who will] . . . fight God’s battles among the Gentiles" ("A Mormon from the Cradle" 8).
And, if the departing youth goes to gain glory by opposing evil, returning missionaries
deserve the hero’s welcome for being "valiant in the fight against sin;" they have become
"champion[s] of the true and everlasting gospel" by waging war "in [the] endless struggle against the oppressor" (10). The article's battle metaphors are hard to miss.

By praising the hero in his epic struggle, the Fifes portray missions as anything but a selfless act, and those who see Mormonism differently may object to the message. But Mormon culture shows that the Fifes are partly right. Stores that sell Mormon merchandise, like Deseret Book, carry a popular line of religious T-shirts that popularize LDS standards. Much like the many variations on the "Hard Rock Café" T-shirts in both Mormon and non-Mormon circles, these Mormon shirts are modeled after contemporary fashion and become a trendy way for the wearer to display his or her religious values.

One such T-shirt has the words "Stripling Warriors" running across the top of a drawing of young men with cartoon-proportioned muscles. The men are leaning together in solidarity and have their arms crossed in a defensive yet menacing manner. Under the drawing reads the words, "Mommas Boys."18 These T-shirts enjoy popularity among young male missionaries, who are often leaving home and their mothers for their "battlefield" on a mission. They identify with the story of the stripling warriors and the popularized depiction of the warriors. Judging from this phenomenon, the Fifes' mock heroic is an accurate reflection of at least part of the cultural view of Mormon missions.

However, even in reflecting one aspect of Mormon culture in their ethnography, the Fifes deflect some of the realities of serving a mission. Returned missionaries also

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18 This T-shirt logo is published in Jana K. Riess's discussion of Mormon kitsch. See Riess 42. For a discussion of the Mormon kitsch, including the Stripling Warrior T-shirt, see Riess 36-47. Riess and I take different approaches to the stripling warrior image. She deals with what this kitsch says about gender roles while I focus more on what it says about a warrior mentality in missionary service.
talk of the Christian service they gave and the love they developed for the people for whom they served. Indeed, in the Mormon register, you "serve" a mission. Wilson has argued similarly when he said Mormonism "is primarily an other-centered religion whose members are encouraged to sacrifice their own interests and devote themselves to the service of others" ("Teach Me All" 4; italics in original). One returned missionary shows this "other-centeredness" as he expresses his love for people he worked with on his mission. In a history he wrote to be passed on to his family, my father, Alan Allred, quotes a 1970 journal entry he made as a missionary in Northern Ireland after seeing a family he had taught join the Church: "I just can't believe the change that has taken place in the Connollys. It really humbles me when I realize how much the Lord has done for them. . . . I just can't believe how much I've grown to love them in the past months." (3). Allred still corresponds with the Connolly family almost three decades later. In the Fifes' ethnography, the love that missionaries develop is concealed because of the focus the Fifes give to other things. The Fifes satirize the mission experience to present one version of Mormon life, not always the one most Mormons would agree with. Like anyone using language, they reveal some things while concealing others.

Another aspect of the Fifes' ethnography of Mormon mission culture deals with the belief of missionaries. In the following passage, the Fifes describe the source of a belief in Mormonism.

No one who has lived for a long time in the environment of Mormonia has failed to recognize the force of this apostolic interlude [a mission] in the lives of the Mormon folk. There is little doubt that the faith is immeasurably strengthened by
it. The missionary has acquired a habit of rising and bearing his testimony. If at first he may have had mental reservations, the habit of expressing his conformity to the social and intellectual pattern set for him by the leadership of the church gradually becomes a kind of intuitive knowledge, a “testimony.” ("A Mormon from the Cradle” 11)

Interestingly, the Fifes’ view of Mormon missionary life is heavily influenced by authorial bias. Austin Fife, as a Mormon missionary in France, wrote “Missionaries are like fraternity men: some of them sing ‘Hallelujah! It’s the Only Thing in the World’ until they convince themselves—others remain damn liars ‘all’ their mission” (Missionary Journal 3). This biographical fact highlights why ethnography can sometimes be controversial. In the authoritative format of published writing, an ethnographer appears objective and definitive; however, the author cannot keep his or her own biases out. It is through those biases that the author makes any interpretations at all. One cannot step outside of culture to describe it.

The Fifes also characterize prayer in a way that can be controversial in its selection of reality. At the same time, their characterization can also be an instructive commentary on Mormon culture. The Fifes characterize prayer primarily through their word choice. For example, the Fifes describe the prayers Mormons offer as "formulas," "rhythmical incantations," and "poems of thanksgiving and request" ("A Mormon from the Cradle" 2). These terms connote formatted and aesthetic pleas, yet they imply a prayer that is neither heartfelt nor directed to deity. "Incantations" conjure images of pagan ritual, while "formulas" and "poems" have functional and aesthetic uses respectively, but
neither suggest what many Mormons would consider a major reason for prayer: to commune and petition an omnipotent and loving God.

Two of the most famous narratives of Mormonism deal with prayer in a way that the Fifes' description dismisses. The story of Joseph Smith's First Vision is told probably more than any narrative in the culture. In it a young boy prays, not with a set prayer, or with a mindless "incantation." Instead he asks God a specific question and in response receives a heavenly vision. This narrative, which is so oft repeated and referred to as an example,\(^\text{19}\) shows a side of Mormon prayer practice hidden by the ethnography of the Fifes. Further, the example of Enos in the Book of Mormon also contrasts with the Fifes' account. In it another young man prays for wisdom. He recounts how his "soul hungered" as he prayed all night petitioning for divine communication (Enos 1:4). Again, this scriptural account is often cited as a model for prayer among Mormons.

Still, although Mormons have only a handful of official set prayers, at times prayers in familiar situations grow mundane and repetitive, even formulaic. Many cultural insiders jokingly add the blessing on dinner to the set prayers in the Church. William A. Wilson includes a story of missionaries initiating "greenies" with a joke that plays off the commonness of prayer in some situations:

The zone leader asked one of the other elders to say the blessing on the food.

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\(^\text{19}\)The impact of Joseph Smith's vision on Mormon culture (in addition to Mormon theology) is dramatic. Neal Lambert and Richard Cracroft have written "The Joseph Smith story [is] . . . not just a series of interesting episodes in our historical literature. It has come to function on a deeper level of our collective psyche as the true narrative of the sacred origins of this last dispensation," (100) and Eric Eliason has written "the canonized version of Joseph Smith's 1820 vision . . . may be the great prototype that many Latter-day Saint conversions recapitulate" ("Toward a the Folkloristic Study" 142). See Lambert and Cracroft 89-104 and Eliason, "Toward a the Folkloristic Study" 142-43.
They all bowed their heads, and the elder very seriously said, "Number nine, Amen." While the poor new missionaries were still recovering from that, the zone leader looked at the elder who had said the prayer and just as seriously retorted, "Elder, you always say the same prayer." ("On Being Human" 12)

The Fifes’ ethnography of Mormon prayer practice is not totally off the mark; not every Mormon prayer is heartfelt. Still, the soul hungering example of Enos in the Book of Mormon is also a model of Mormon prayer practices. In this case, the dialogue the Fifes contribute to is instructive on the range of the Mormon experience from the ideal to the sometimes practical reality.

**The Fifes’ Classic Ethnographic Rhetoric**

As argued in the first chapter of this thesis, the rhetoric of ethnography has the tendency to objectify the subjects of research. Mary Louise Pratt discusses why this happens: “One [an ethnographer] experiences the indigenous environment and lifeways for oneself. . . . But the professional text to result from such an encounter is supposed to conform to the norms of a scientific discourse whose authority resides in the absolute effacement of the speaking and experiencing subject” (32). The Fifes’ ethnography of Mormon culture falls into this same trap of using a totalizing and scientific rhetoric to describe a dynamic culture of which they, by virtue of their research (if nothing else), are part.

Another example of their ethnography will show this objectifying rhetoric. In “A Mormon from the Cradle to the Grave,” the Fifes describe the courting rituals that take
place as a male Mormon missionary returns from preaching the Gospel.

The mission experience itself, during which the young man refrains from any sort of intimacy with members of the opposite sex, acts as a force hastening him towards marriage. Correspondence with the young woman of his choice may have developed into affirmations of love and affection, proposal of marriage, and plans for the future as a kind of vicarious satisfaction of his unfulfilled sex drives. And if during his absence the idol of his puppy love has turned her eye upon another suitor and written him a “Dear John” letter, a new-found love will speedily restore his shattered pride, and provide for him the helpmate without whom it will be impossible to achieve respectability in the Mormon community and an inheritance in the spirit world. (12-13)

Despite the terminological slip of calling the final destination in Mormon afterlife a “spirit world,” much of what the Fifes write could be an accurate description of Mormon culture, especially in the broad outlines that they portray. However, in the course of writing about Mormon courtship, the Fifes make formal, distant, and scientific what is perhaps some of the most subjective and emotional of human experience, finding a partner and falling in love. Interestingly, they invoke the scientist Freud, to explain how the latent sex drives influence the actions of the missionaries.

This passage exemplifies much of what Rosaldo has called the rhetoric of classic ethnography. For example, it is written in the ethnographic present as if it could be taking place at this very moment (a false impression because Mormon culture, in many ways, is dissimilar to what it was in 1956). The passage also assumes that all missionaries are
male and is written from a male perspective. Further, the emotions and conflicts involved in loving, losing love, and being away from those dear to a missionary are ignored (the missionary missing family and friends is also deflected). The missionary becomes a robot seeking a wife who will give him status in the community. The passage also assumes a unified culture; the Fifes don’t discuss variations on their courtship formula. Case studies and the voice of the cultural participants are conspicuously absent. The description would be much different with a missionary describing how such a situation felt.

Although it seems that the Fifes saw Mormon culture as a homogeneous group, in other places they show that such a conclusion is simplistic. The Fifes also wrote that “Mormonia must not be conceived as a static thing: change rather than stability is characteristic of all American life” (Saints of Sage and Saddle xii). Yet, their methodology and rhetoric present a simplified culture, once again pointing out the need for more reflexive ethnography, ethnographies that can capture the conflicts, clashes, and hybridity of a culture.

Again, one must make a distinction between attacking the professionalism of the Fifes and critiquing how their ethnography shows the limitations of 1950s methodology and rhetoric. It would be highly unfair to attack the Fifes personally or expect them to have a 1990s methodology forty years earlier. However, because their text is still being read, that text can and should be critiqued reflexively to see what biases influenced it, biases that stem from both methodology and personal experience. Further, it is important to understand that my own critique of the Fifes’ work is filtered through my own set of biases. Just as the Fifes could not step outside of a context to describe it, neither can I.
Rhetoric or Culture?

An important question arises during this discussion of the Fifes’ rhetoric. Do some contemporary readers object to the rhetoric of the Fifes or just to the fact that they describe an older form of Mormon culture, one that is not as appealing? This argument’s reasoning is that if the Fifes present a culture that is stagnant, superstitious, and provincial in comparison to today’s Mormonism, then that is a reflection of what Mormon Utah was like in the 1950s. It is true that the Fifes were writing in a time when LDS culture was different. For example, the culture did not have the emphasis that every young man should serve a mission, and the concentration of the church members in the Intermountain West did isolate the culture from outsiders to an extent. In many ways Mormon culture was not as dynamic in comparison with contemporary standards.²⁰ Tracking the changes in Mormon culture is beyond the scope of this project, but acknowledging that changes have taken place highlights the need for debate and dialogue among the differing ethnographic perspectives.

The dialogue proposed here is a good way to avoid the limiting of one’s judgements of a culture to only one reflection of it. Hufford explains, “We can never have a set of observations made from everywhere . . . but the more views we consider, the more reason we have to be hopeful about our conclusions” ("The Scholarly Voice" 60; italics in original). Chronological myopia is always a danger in ethnography. One of the best ways to overcome it is to listen to and critique many perspectives from different time

²⁰Mormon culture’s reliance on the Book of Mormon is another good example of changes that have taken place in Mormonism in the past century. See Reynolds.
periods. The dialogic result will lessen the myopia. In the case of the Fifes' "A Mormon from the Cradle to the Grave," realizing that some of the difference may not just be the slant of the writer’s views enables a more honest critique and more fodder for the conversation.

Elaine Lawless and Reflexive Mormon Ethnography

The Fifes ceased work before many ethnographers began looking reflexively at texts, so we cannot compare their unreflexive and reflexive work. (If they were still working today, their work would likely be more reflexive.) However, another ethnographer can give a comparison between reflexive and unreflexive Mormon ethnography. Elaine J. Lawless’s work on religious belief includes a 1984 essay, "'I Know If I Don’t Bear My Testimony, I’ll Lose It': Why Mormon Women Bother to Speak At All," which analyzes the Mormon cultural phenomenon of testimony meeting. The pejorative title suggests the argument of the piece, which is that Mormon women bear their testimonies to "maintain the status quo" and keep from losing more power in the community. Lawless’s interpretation of Mormon women’s testimonies includes the argument that

If Mormon women cannot hold the Priesthood (as all males can), if Mormon women can only hope for a truly elegant home in heaven as the faithful mate of a Priesthood-holding husband, and if there is absolutely no way for a woman to become a God and rule the heavens for eternity, then why do Mormon women bother to speak at all in the testimony service? ("I know if I don’t bear my
According to the Burkean theory of reflection and deflection in language, Lawless does show an aspect of Mormon culture, yet her conclusions are based on a one-sided view of Mormon doctrine, and some mainstream Mormons would argue with her interpretation of Mormon culture and doctrine. Defining women’s roles in the Church is a controversial issue, but Lawless’s approach is unreflexive in the fact that her ethnography is far off base from where many male or female Mormons would describe their own culture. Many of the women she quotes would probably not accept all of her interpretations. The treatment of testimony meetings is also limited because she fails to deal with other situations when Mormon women bear testimonies (in the home or in other meetings, where there are no men present, for example). In a recent e-mail, Lawless admitted that the piece is unreflexive because her "reciprocal ethnography," a form of reflexivity, "hadn’t really jelled as a methodology" when she wrote the article on Mormon women (E-mail). Had she used a more reflexive methodology and rhetoric, her point of view might not have changed, but the voice of the women and the culture she describes might not have been so silent. Then a cultural dialogue would appear.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Lawless has written more reflexive ethnographies. Her book, *Holy Women, Wholly Women*, shows the product of her efforts to give the informant more voice. Lawless’s biases still influence her interpretations, but she tries to show when an interpretation is hers and whether or not the informant culture would agree. Many times in the midst of her book, she makes an assertion and then mentions whether the women she is writing about agree or disagree. The result is a book
that gives great insight into the interactions and cultural context of mainstream Christian female ministers. One can wonder, then, what would be the result if Lawless wrote a sequel to her "Why Mormon Women Bother to Speak At All" article. Such a piece would have many case studies and personal narratives so that the informant voice, instead of being objectified, could be heard directly. Such an ethnography could still include the researcher interpretations: the writer would not just become a recorder. Rather, the researcher/writer would interact with the informants and more closely reproduce the fieldwork context in the text. A reflexive Mormon ethnography would be more democratic, more accurate, and would let the reader see where the researcher is coming from in describing a culture. Such an ethnography could have added to the Fifes’ ability to describe culture as it has Lawless’s.

Conclusion

There is a tension between the Fifes’ humanistic treatment of Mormon culture and the culture’s sometimes rosy picture of itself. Discussing where the two (and other) views diverge can illuminate points where the values of Mormons are not always expressed in their actions. The dialogue can also present more perspectives of an inherently biased discussion. The Fifes may point out less-than-saintly motives among the Latter-day Saints, and the culture can return with an explanation of another reason they do certain things. Every side of an argument can look at what others reflect and deflect.

Reflexive methodologies in ethnography can help when conflicts such as these arise because they allow more voices to be heard than traditional ethnography. A
discourse is created, and this "polyphony" of voices in almost all cases can shed at least some light on a culture. Each voice will have a certain perspective on the culture, and examined with other voices, it can create, if not a complete picture of the culture, at least real conversation.
Chapter 3

From Survivalism to Functionalism: William A. Wilson and the Emic Perspective

On May 31, 1972, William A. Wilson visited the home of Austin and Alta Fife and interviewed them about their folklore contributions. Besides the immense value of this conversation, which preserved the Fifes' views on their work, the interview is also significant because the voices heard on that interview tape belong to some of the most important Mormon folklorists of the first and second generations of Mormon folklore study. The interview took place when the Fifes were nearing the end of their careers as active folklorists while Wilson was just beginning to come on the scene; thus, the interview has a "changing of the guard" dimension. To understand the development of Mormon folklore as a discipline, one must understand the Fifes, and then one must understand how Wilson continued their work.

Accordingly, this chapter will closely examine the work of Wilson, especially in comparison to the Fifes. Wilson's and the Fifes' work is very different in both their theoretical and ideological assumptions and in the subject matter they tackled within the wide realm of Mormon folklore. Many of these changes can be illustrated by seeing the
Fifes’ work as a survivalist project and Wilson’s as a functional one. Wilson’s work is also characterized by his emic perspective, and both functionalism and the insider approach have enabled his folklore writings to provide better ethnography than the work of the Fifes or any other Mormon folklorists before him.

The shift from the Fife period to the Wilson period can best be viewed as a shift from a textual survivalist folklore project to a functional and, therefore, more contextual approach to Mormon lore. Such a shift saw the ethnographic function of folklore analysis increase. The Fifes were tireless collectors of folklore (the beginning of their careers was when they collected most of their Mormon folklore) and they often published their research. Even though Wilson also collected folklore and helped establish folklore archives at both Utah State University and Brigham Young University, his contribution to Mormon folklore has focused more on describing the complex Mormon culture than in preserving its folklore texts.

The Next Generation of Mormon Folklore

Wilson can be seen as the successor to the Fifes for several reasons. By the 1970s, the Fifes’ work was winding down as Austin’s Parkinson’s disease affected him more and more. He soon retired from Utah State University. At about the same time, Wilson began to take over as the preeminent Mormon folklorist, publishing his first article on Mormon folklore in 1969. By the mid seventies, Wilson was regularly publishing important articles on Mormon folklore, including "Folklore and History," "The Paradox of Mormon
Folklore." "The Vanishing Hitchhiker among the Mormons," and others.\textsuperscript{21} Further, Wilson has become the leading Mormon folklorist. By virtue of their publishing \textit{Saints of Sage and Saddle}, the Fifes had established themselves as the experts in Mormon folklore. Wilson’s assumption of that position is evidenced by separate articles titled "Mormon Folklore" in Richard Dorson’s influential \textit{Handbook of American Folklore}, in \textit{Mormon Americana: A Guide to Sources and Collections in the United States}, and in the \textit{Encyclopedia of Mormonism}.\textsuperscript{22} In these three articles, Wilson speaks as the foremost authority on Mormon folklore to three different audiences: American folklorists, Mormon academics, and Mormons in general.\textsuperscript{23} As a final note, Wilson can also be seen as a successor to the Fifes because of his work in cementing their legacy. In 1978, Wilson moved from BYU to Utah State University and was instrumental in establishing two reminders of the Fifes’ important work: the Fife Conference and the Fife Folklore Archives.

However, it is limiting to view Wilson as only a torchbearer who received a handoff from the Fifes. Such an image implies two falsehoods. First, it suggests that there were no other important folklorists working with Mormon lore. Barre Toelken, Margaret Brady, Jan Brunvand, Richard Dorson, and Richard Poulsen all worked to some extent on Mormon folklore from the 1960s on. However, I will focus mainly on the Fifes and

\textsuperscript{21} See the appendix for a complete list of Wilson’s Mormon folklore articles.

\textsuperscript{22} Wilson also wrote the entry for the Three Nephites in the \textit{Encyclopedia of Mormonism}. See Wilson, "Three Nephites."

\textsuperscript{23} Another manifestation of Mormon folklore scholarship is Mormons who are scholars in non-Mormon folklore. Wilson also falls into this category. His work on folklore and nationalism has been important and well received.
Wilson because of their influential work. The other problem is that the torchbearer image also implies that Wilson’s work continues the pattern set by the Fifes. In fact, Wilson’s work differs greatly in its subject matter, ideology, and theoretical approach.

**Subject Matter.** The subject matter of the Fifes’ and Wilson’s folklore studies differs in two ways. First, neither spent all their time studying Mormon folklore. The Fifes were also experts in western and cowboy ballads and were influential writers of material culture. They co-edited *Forms upon the Frontier* with Henry Glassie and the book was used as a material culture textbook for a time because it was the best treatment of the under-examined subject (Wilson, Interview). Further, Austin spent much of his professional energy in areas outside of folklore. For many years he was a department head at Utah State University where he taught French language and literature. It wasn’t until the 1970s that he began teaching folklore at Utah State, and he retired soon after that.

Wilson’s work also spreads beyond the study of the folklore of Mormons, and it does so in ways different than the Fifes. Wilson’s dissertation was on Finish nationalism and folklore and his only book is a form of that dissertation, *Folklore and Nationalism in Modern Finland.* He also wrote an article on a related subject titled "Herder, Folklore and Romantic Nationalism." Wilson’s work in this area is significant. Folklore studies historian Regina Bendix has written that Wilson’s works on Finland and Herder were "among the first instances presented to an American readership of the intertwining of disciplinary history and national aspirations" (214).

The Fifes and Wilson also studied different aspects of Mormon folklore. Much of
the Fifes' work dealt with Mormon folklore generally and with Utah material culture. Their most important work on Mormon folklore was *Saints of Sage and Saddle*, which is still the most important book-length treatment of Mormon folklore. On the other hand, much of Wilson's work looks at more specific areas of Mormon culture, such as jokes, personal and family narratives, and missionary culture. A large part of his approach looks at how Mormon culture reflects aspects of common humanity and how Mormon folklore mirrors Mormon culture.

**Ideology.** The Fifes' and Wilson's ideology also vary. First, they represent different generations of folklorists. The Fifes were from the tradition of folklore as a "gentleman's recreation" instead of a vocation. For example, the Fifes did much of their collecting on the weekends and on summer breaks, times when their "real" work could be put on hold. Along the same line, when they began working, folklore was popularly seen as part of anthropology or language studies but hardly as a discipline of its own. On the other hand, Wilson studied at Indiana University and worked with Richard Dorson, the institutionalizer of folklore. Wilson's work assumes the existence of a Mormon folklore discipline, and because of this, Wilson takes on a role similar to Dorson, that of defender of the folklore "faith." Jill Terry Rudy has argued that Wilson's "greatest contribution to the study of Mormon folklore . . . is his role in defining the field for both folklore scholars and the Mormon public" (4). Many of Wilson's articles begin with some sort of justification of the discipline and an explanation of what Mormon folklore is.

One of the most important ideological differences between Wilson and the Fifes is their activity within and attitudes toward the culture they describe. As seen in Chapter
two, the Fifes were part of the Mormon culture, but definitely not believing Mormons. Wilson, on the other hand, presents his work from more of a cultural insider perspective. The ramifications of this difference will be addressed later in this chapter.

**Theoretical Approach.** Finally, the Fifes and Wilson built their work on the current folklore theory of their times, but theory is constantly changing. Some differences between Wilson and the Fifes reflect the changing academic landscape of American folklore theory. For example, the Fifes' work was very textually oriented: they spent much of their time collecting and cataloguing many variant versions, and much of their writing reports the textual versions. "A Ballad of the Mountain Meadows Massacre" is an excellent example. The article begins with a history of the ballad and announces two new variants (229). The article contains much useful textual analysis, but hardly mentions the effects of the ballad on the culture or the context in which the texts find themselves embedded.

On the other hand, Wilson's work is heavily influenced with functionalism, a more contextual approach. In functionalism, the researcher assumes that the folklore text is transmitted in a culture for a reason and then analyzes the text for that reason. He or she answers the question "What function does this piece of folklore play in the culture?" The shift from textual concerns to contextual concerns is a reflection of the American folklore scholarship. If Wilson had written the article on the ballads of the Mountain Meadows Massacre with his contextual approach, the questions he would most likely address are how the ballads reflect the culture's feelings about the horrible event and why the ballads get passed on. Again, this difference is influenced by the changing emphasis of American
folklore theory.

Another theoretical matter that separates the work of Wilson and the Fifes is their conception of the "folk." The word folklore was coined in England in 1846 by combining the Anglo-Saxon words "folk" and "lore." The Anglo-Saxon aspect is significant because it reflects the roots of British society and is related to the common and the rural. For a hundred years or more, folklorists worked with the commoners, assuming that the lore they were collecting existed primarily among the unlearned, the agrarian, and the poor. Folklorists saw the rich body of traditional songs, jokes, and ideas of the folk as antithetical to education and urbanization. As the Industrial Revolution and modernization produced more cities and increased literacy, many folklorists believed that the lore would die out. and thus, the surviving bits of the folklore needed to be preserved. The Fifes were influenced by this idea in their work. In "Folk Belief and Mormon Cultural Autonomy," Austin implies that despite the civilization of Utah, the folk concepts that set Mormons apart from the rationality of American culture are alive and well (29-30). That he would use the imagery of "civilization" to represent what is not folk is a telling example.

However, in the past thirty years or more, folklorists have begun viewing the folk in different terms, and Wilson sums up their position: "Contemporary folklorists now understand that there is no monolithic, unchanging group of people called the "folk"; there are instead many "folks"—that is, many folk groups . . . constantly changing and constantly generating or reshaping folklore as they respond to the circumstances of their environments" (Rev. of Quinn 101). In this definition, he clarifies that folk groups are
"clusters of people with similar interests and identities" (101). And such a definition represents a view of the folk that can include anyone. This theoretical position sees folklore as a process of re-creation. A culture will take its lore, and as it is passed on, the culture modifies it to reflect their contemporary concerns. This is one of Wilson’s major messages regarding the Three Nephite legends. At one time the Nephites would help farmers plow or harvest their wheat, but now, as Mormons predominately live in urban areas, the Three Nephites will help fix their cars.\textsuperscript{24} With the new conception of the "folk," folklore does not die out in the face of rational education or urbanization, it just modifies as cultures change.

The preceding discussion reveals the essence of the differences between Wilson’s work and the Fifes’: the shift from survivalism to functionalism. In the end, this is probably the biggest area of divergence between the two (or three) folklorists. William A. Wilson is the successor to the Fifes, but he diverges from their emphasis on collecting the surviving texts of Mormonism past and instead looks at how the texts that are being communally re-created function in Mormon culture. This difference from survivalism to functionalism is reflected in the rhetoric used to describe culture.

\textbf{Survivalism to Functionalism}

I argued in Chapter two that the Fifes’ rhetoric, because of language’s inherent terministic screens, both concealed and revealed aspects of cultural reality. Of course, since Wilson also uses language, his rhetoric will also both conceal and reveal aspects of

\textsuperscript{24}See Wilson, “Mormon Legends,” and “Freeways, Parking Lots, and Ice Cream Stands.”
reality. This is true in something as basic as the fact that Wilson's emphasis on Mormon folklore centers in the western United States and will not reflect the folklore of Mormons in France, South Africa, or Hong Kong. However, Wilson uses a theoretical background that does better in representing culture than the scientific, traditional ethnography that the Fifes often used, and his rhetoric manifests this background. Wilson writes his folklore analysis in ways that will describe the culture instead of solely looking at the texts that circulate. He does this by looking at the function of the folklore.

Functionalism entered folklore studies in the 1950s, and one of its most important proponents was William Bascom. As mentioned above, functionalism seeks to place a folklore text in a context and show how the culture uses the folklore. Bascom noted four major functions of folklore. Folklore can (1) provide entertainment, (2) "justify" the "rituals and institutions" of a culture to its members, (3) educate, and (4) encourage observance of cultural norms and expectations (290-98). Wilson is obviously influenced by the functionalism of Bascom. In fact one of Wilson's important articles is titled, "The Paradox of Mormon Folklore" which plays off of Bascom's title "The Paradox of Folklore." Wilson also uses a metaphor of folklore acting as a mirror of a culture ("Folklore, a Mirror"). This metaphor is also used by Bascom (285), and Wilson's thinking on this subject was probably influenced by Bascom.

Functionalism, as applied by Wilson in his work, allows him to explore what the narratives "mean to the people who tell them" and about the "force of folklore in the lives of human beings" ("The Paradox of Mormon Folklore" 46). Such an approach will get deeper into the culture that produces folklore texts. It also opens up the possibility for the
voice of the culture to be heard. It is easy to find examples from Wilson’s writings that are functional in nature. Consider the following example from "On Being Human":

All of the stories we are considering here . . . follow what I call an anxiety-reducing formula. In the performance of such a story, the narrator will "name," or identify, a recurrent problem (a missionary who seems possessed by an evil force, for example, or a hostile community that threatens the safety of the missionaries): the performer will seek in the traditional stories available to him accounts of similar problems solved in the past; applying the wisdom gleaned from these stories, he will suggest a behavioral resolution to the present difficulty (don’t break mission rules or work hard and trust the Lord). Missionaries who participate in such performances will have their fears allayed, will gain a sense of control over a threatening environment, and will thus be able to work more effectively. (21; italics added)

This passage presents a functionalist viewpoint in describing culture. In ways it is similar to Bascom’s third and fourth functions of folklore. Wilson describes missionary folklore in terms of how it teaches and how it can encourage culturally desirable behavior. A missionary who participates in the telling of a folklore story like the ones Wilson analyzes will be more likely to obey the mission rules or to work hard and trust in the Lord, all things that are expected norms in mission culture.

One of the benefits of functionalism is that it presents more of an insider perspective of a culture than textual approaches. Because it focuses so much on what the culture thinks and the performative context of the folklore, the beliefs and insights of the
culture become more readily apparent. Compare, for example the treatment of J. Golden Kimball stories by both the Fifes and by Wilson. Fife recounts story after story, each introduced and concluded like the one below.

At least one of the yarns of the Abraham Lincoln cycle has passed over to J. Golden. It is the one about his being attacked by a mad dog. In self-defense J. Golden grabbed a pitchfork and buried one of the tines in the dog’s throat. . . . The owner of the dog flew into a rage and asked why in heaven’s name he had shoved the pitchfork down the dog’s throat. "Because," answered Golden, "that’s the end he came at me with." *(Saints of Sage and Saddle* 307)

Depending on ones’ purpose in reading, the way the Fifes present these stories is fine. But from an ethnographic viewpoint, this rhetoric reveals little about the culture that tells the story. Now consider the way a functionalist approaches a J. Golden Kimball story:

We should remember that the J. Golden Kimball stories are, in the final analysis, no longer about J. Golden Kimball at all. They are about us. We are the ones who keep them alive by continual retelling and continual reshaping. We should be concerned, I believe, not so much with trying to characterize Kimball but rather with trying to understand ourselves . . . and trying to discover what need the telling of the stories fills in our own lives.

I believe it is a need to assert one’s own personality and to resist, or at least to deflate, those who exercise authority over us. (Wilson, "The Paradox of Mormon Folklore" 54-55)

Following this passage, Wilson goes on to explore his assertion more. As shown here, the
functional approach lets the reader see beyond the text to why a culture tells a story and ultimately what that culture is like.

Wilson’s passage above is vastly different from the way the Fifes wrote about Mormon folklore. The fact that the Fifes write much of *Saints of Sage and Saddle* with little emphasis on ethnography is not a fault, but it shows a different priority: the Fifes’ main purpose in doing Mormon folklore was not ethnography (although to some degree writing about folklore is inescapably ethnographic). Wilson, on the other hand, is mainly concerned with ethnography. This difference represents their differing approaches. However, as shown earlier, even when the Fifes’ work aims at ethnography, it shows a non-functional approach that easily misrepresents culture.

**Functionalism and the Emic Approach**

Even though functionalism does a better job at making folklore studies ethnographic, the dangers of misrepresenting culture are ever present. As discussed in Chapter One, Elaine Lawless has written about Mormon culture in a way that tends to misrepresent the culture. Her article on why Mormon women bear their testimonies has functionalist influences in its interpretations. For example, she contends that Mormon women’s testimonies serve a specific purpose: they show that the woman is "striv[ing] . . . to be more appreciative and more thankful" in an effort to just maintain her "subordinate position in exchange for the promise of a place in The Celestial Kingdom" ("I Know If I Don’t Bear My Testimony" 94). As discussed earlier, Lawless’s conclusions do not fully represent the sentiments of the cultural insiders, her
informants. Clearly functionalism is not the only ingredient in producing strong and authentic descriptions of culture.

Another aspect of good ethnography is including the insider perspective, and the subject of the insider voice is another area where the scholarship of the Fifes and Wilson differs. To some extent, all three of these folklorists knew Mormon culture. However, only Wilson actively participated in the observances and rituals of Mormonism. Further, Wilson seems to have a more sympathetic view of Mormonism. Austin revealed that he and Alta had "a chip on their shoulders" towards Mormon culture at times, specifically when they began working on *Saints of Sage and Saddle* (Wilson, Interview).

However, their attitudes toward Mormon culture were more complex than just antipathy. Austin wrote elsewhere that he "treasured his [Mormon] heritage." He qualifies that statement by saying "I have [also] strived to develop loyalties which transcend it, encompassing my country and my world in which I live" ("Folk Elements" 16). On the other hand, Wilson places himself directly in the culture as a full insider. For instance, in discussing the validity of a Three Nephites story, he writes "I cannot disprove the story. I have, in fact, no desire to disprove it. I hope it is true. It would support my conviction that God really does come to the aid of missionaries in danger" ("Mormon Folklore: Faith or Folly?" 52). Because Wilson is within the culture, he can discern some of the issues that accompany the telling of folklore stories, and he can address those subtleties of the culture. In this case he addresses the fact that some Three Nephites stories are told earnestly as true experiences, yet some in the culture see the same story as a fabrication. Wilson attempts to relieve the tension on this issue, and it is due to his insider status that
he is sensitive to it.

Some may view this argument differently, saying that the reason Wilson can please the Mormon culture is that he caters to it by giving it what it wants to hear. To a certain extent, this is true. Wilson’s rhetoric often proclaims its author as "one of us." Admitting this point, however, does not mean that Wilson is uncritical or that his insiderness is a ploy. The fact is that Wilson’s rhetoric, with its functionalism and his insider voice, makes the ethnography more descriptive of Mormon culture.

The insider perspective is something that many traditional ethnographies discount, partly because traditional ethnographies were often about indigenous cultures whose learning systems valued different objectives. Consequently, university-trained ethnographers who wanted to write about indigenous cultures were usually outsiders. However, with theoretical shifts in what types of cultures can have ethnographies written about them, insiders are doing more ethnography of their own cultures. Rosaldo gives Américo Paredes, Ernesto Galaraza, and Sandra Cisneros as examples of this phenomenon (148). The benefits of being an insider when doing ethnography are well stated in Wolcott: "Only here [writing ethnography as an insider] . . . do I observe, participate, and write under conditions in which I am most likely to understand most of which is going on, with humor, nuance, double entendre, conflicting explanations" (265).

Wolcott continues with an observation also important for those wanting to write reflexively: "Only here is it likely that the subjects of my studies will not only see the

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25 Rosaldo deals specifically with Paredes’s “With a Pistol in His Hand”, A Border Ballad and Its Hero, Galaraza’s Barrio Boy, and Cisneros’s The House on Mango Street.
published results but will also know how to raise academic issue with them and thus be able to subject me to possible talk among my colleagues, just as I may, however inadvertently, create risks for them among theirs" (265). For those who accept the idea that dialogue and multiple perspectives on culture will improve cultural understanding, insider ethnography can be a tool in facilitating conversation. Wolcott even goes as far to suggest that insider ethnography can give the subjects of research more redress when misrepresentation occurs.

Still, the notion of a cultural insider can be a problematic term. Questions of the qualifications of insider status are perplexing because there is no unified culture with identical members. Each culture is made up of an interweaving of common beliefs, practices, experience, etc., and each member of a culture differs in his or her allegiances. The status of a cultural insider is a positioned one. For this reason, a University of Missouri folklore class saw the Fifes as Mormon insiders (Wilson, "Mormon Folklore, a Mirror" 14), while a folklore class at Brigham Young University saw them as outsiders (David Allred 44).

**Wilson’s Work as Ethnography**

As discussed in Chapter One, reflexive theorists have identified some criteria of effective ethnographies (from a reflexivist’s point of view). To adequately describe a culture, an ethnography must be able to show the tensions of a heterogeneous culture, including the multiple perspectives of the conflicting subcultures and of the marginalized. An ethnography must also admit that it has a rhetoric and that the culture of its creation is
embedded in the text. Also, in the move towards reflexivity, the canon of texts is often modified as new voices and perspectives emerge.

Examining the differences between the Fifes’ and Wilson’s work shows a general trend towards ethnography in folkloristics. Increasingly folklore analysis turns away from collecting and cataloguing variant versions of texts towards looking at folklore as a manifestation of cultural groups. Wilson’s work moves beyond some of the drawbacks of classic ethnographic rhetoric as it describes culture better. Wilson’s work is a step in the right direction because it deals with the folk in a more democratic way, shows a complex culture, and acknowledges conflict within culture.

Wilson’s work fulfills many of these criteria, which shows the greatest cultural description of his rhetoric. For example, Wilson admits a complex and multivocal culture in his cultural descriptions. In "The Seriousness of Mormon Humor," he writes, "It would be a mistake to assume, then, as folklorists and others often do, that what is true of one Mormon will be true of them all or that most Mormons will respond in similar ways to the telling of Mormon jokes. It is impossible to stereotype Mormons" (13). He also admits his personal voice into the rhetoric of cultural description and weds his own interests to the texts he produces:

A former Mormon missionary, I have for the past fifteen years been collecting, studying, writing about, and especially enjoying the folklore of Mormon missionaries. . . . The lore makes me laugh, makes me angry, and yes, sometimes moves me to tears. More important, it has the same impact on the missionary narrators and audiences whose lives it directly relates and from whose experiences
it develops. ("The Deeper Necessity" 161-62)

Nowhere in Wilson’s rhetoric does the image of the detached scholar emerge. Instead, the image is one of a scholar who is situated in the culture and whose rhetoric is influenced by the culture he is describing. Finally, his work also includes the voice of the culture he is describing:

When we [Wilson and John B. Harris, a colleague and research partner] first began to uncover these practices, we seriously wondered about the dedication of "ministers of the gospel" who would participate in such frivolous activity. Then a couple of our informants taught us what we should have known all along. One of them, a fellow who had protested to us that no such pranks had ever been played on him during his mission, later came to Professor Harris’s office, laid his head on the desk and sobbed, "I was never really part of the missionaries; now I know that I had no jokes played on me because I was not accepted." Another young man told me that when he arrived in the Philippines, the first meal he was served in the mission home was made up of all green food served on green dishes on green linen to remind him of his greenness. "I felt like I had been baptized," He said. And this is exactly what these pranks are—baptisms, or initiation rituals. ("On Being Human" 13)

In this passage, Wilson shows how his preconceptions were changed by his informants. In essence, he shows in his rhetoric that the informant plays a crucial role in interpreting his or her own voice. The fact that Wilson includes not only his revised interpretations, but also shows the influence of the culture on those interpretations, is an admission that
the "folk" are partners in research. All of these characteristics make Wilson’s work effective ethnography.

**Conclusion**

One of the purposes of this chapter has been to look at ways the ethnography of Wilson differs from the Fifes. Wilson’s combination of his insider status, his definition of the folk, and his functionalist rhetoric does make his writings more ethnographically accurate than the Fifes. However, this chapter has also pointed out that many of the differences between the Fifes and Wilson result from changes in the scholarly climate of American folklore studies. The shift from survivalism to functionalism, the changing face of the folk, and the lessening of the rigorous scientific background that would preclude a functionalist perspective all relate to the differences in the rhetoric of Mormon folklore. Consequently, it may not be fair to create a hierarchy of representational accuracy.

Further, although this chapter has argued that Wilson’s work better describes Mormon culture than does the Fifes’, one should not assume that Wilson’s work doesn’t also select a reality in the culture while deflecting other aspects of it. In some of his latest articles, Wilson has begun calling for a new emphasis in the field of Mormon folklore. Consequently, the concluding chapter will look at possible new directions in Mormon ethnography as presented in its folklore literature.
Chapter 4
A Reflexive Rhetoric for Mormon Folklore

Joseph Smith, as the founder of Mormonism, has had a significant impact on both the religion and the culture, even a century and a half after his death. And two portions of his "writings" have a tangential, but an interesting relation to this thesis. This chapter will begin with one and end with the other. In 1831, Smith recorded a revelation from God which predicted that Mormonism would emerge "out of obscurity and out of darkness" to be understood by many (Doctrine and Covenants 1:30). Disregarding the theological implications of Smith's revelation, the statement can apply to Mormon ethnography and its attempts to represent what Mormon culture is like. Ethnography's project is to bring cultures out of obscurity, whatever that culture might be.

Smith’s prophesy of Mormonism coming out of darkness is also a projection of future events, and thus, it is appropriate for an introduction to this chapter, which will examine how reflexivity could affect the way future Mormon ethnography is written. To do this, the chapter discusses the representations that implicitly arise in folklore writings, highlighting Wilson’s argument that past texts have misrepresented Mormon culture. The
chapter identifies past writings that give examples for future reflexive work, places reflexive ethnography in the context of current debates on the nature of Mormon writing, and proposes ways to apply reflexivity to Mormon folklore scholarship.

My argument about ethnography has been made repeatedly in this thesis: writing about culture can misrepresent culture. The process of selecting, observing, and writing about a culture is filtered through many possible biases. Researchers have preexisting beliefs about a culture that seep into the fieldwork notes, and they will always see a foreign culture through the lens of their native culture. Further, even the term *culture* is problematic, as mentioned earlier. A single "culture" is made up of a myriad of smaller, competing cultures that are not mutually exclusive. The writing process also skews data as a researcher/ethnographer has to make the abstract actions and beliefs of the Other conform to the conventions of academic writing. The prospects for an exactly "true" ethnography are dismal at best and ultimately impossible.

But this is not breaking news. The relativity of ethnographic accounts has always been fairly obvious. Multiple perspectives are needed, if for no other reason than to serve as confirmation of a researcher's observations and interpretations. However, the academic conventions of publishing research often demand that hypotheses be made and tested, and that reasoning will result in conclusions about culture. These conclusions, when put forward, have an air of finality that ironically finds itself in opposition to the admission that no conclusion is final. This difficulty is most pronounced when the conclusions are read by non-experts who may only read one book on the Trobriand Islanders, or the Zulu, or the Mormons. Without the benefit of being a regular participant in discussions on a
culture’s ethnography, the reader may end up with ideas that are offensive or foreign to
the culture about whom they are learning. And beyond this, the culture about which they
are leaning has no opportunity to describe itself.

**How Folklore Can Represent Culture**

This process can be illustrated by looking at how Mormon folklore describes
Mormon culture. Consider someone who had never heard of Mormonism reading Richard
Dorson’s treatment of "Utah Mormons" in his book *American Folklore*. The ten-page
report of Mormon folklore characterizes Mormon culture. It gives a page and a half
account of the beginnings of the Mormon religion followed by tales of the Three Nephites
and J. Golden Kimball. Of course, Dorson is not trying to describe Mormon culture as
much as introduce others to the most famous aspects of Mormon folklore. Still, his work
has an ethnographic function, and it paints a limited picture of Mormonism. Admittedly,
the Mormon culture tells stories of Three Nephites and J. Golden Kimball, but the
emphasis on these texts gives the impression that Three Nephite stories are more
important than they are in Mormon culture. Also Dorson’s treatment of the stories fails to
look at whether or not the Mormons who tell the stories believe them or in what contexts
the stories are told. For instance, it is important to note that many times Mormons tell the
stories as "items of curiosity" (Wilson, "Mormon Legends" 5). Further, Mormons tell
other types of stories as well. The focus on the supernatural ignores the more common,
but more important, stories of service and dedication that characterize Mormon culture
(Wilson, "‘Teach Me All’").
Dorson’s folklore inquiry also misrepresents Mormon culture in two other ways. First, Dorson wrote his book in 1959, and at that time the Mormon culture was much more centered in rural Utah. His description "Utah Mormons" was most likely phrased to distinguish the LDS from RLDS Mormons, but the description assumes that all Mormons are in Utah. This is a problem because Mormon culture is spreading into countries around the world. The Dorson article is now dated by both the passage of time and by the growth of the number of Mormons worldwide. Also, Dorson’s text falls into a non-functional mode that focuses on texts, instead of giving attention to the culture behind the folklore stories. Such an approach is not wrong, especially according to 1959 theoretical constructs, but the approach limits the ethnographic value of the text that will inherently describe culture. In a non-functional text, the cultural descriptions are inferred from the rhetoric of the text rather than from the data from the field.

This is not to say that more recent texts do not misrepresent culture as well. Danette Paul tells of taking a folklore seminar from William A. Wilson when he was discussing the stories that Mormon missionaries tell. Paul, a returned missionary, realized that the stories "were not part of my missionary experience" (i). As a result, she collected stories told by sister missionaries and wrote "Missionaries without Ties." Like Dorson, the limitation of Wilson’s research was not due to unprofessionalism or sloth. When he wrote "On Being Human" Wilson used eleven volumes of mission stories for evidence ("On Being Human" 5), a sufficiently professional approach. Instead, as Wilson has explained, when he and John B. Harris collected many of their stories in the 1960s and 70s, there were far fewer females going on missions, which limited the lore that was
collected about them ("Eighteen Years Later" 60).

With a changing culture, the folklore collections have changed. Several other collections of sister missionary stories also resulted from Wilson’s folklore classes, and several mention (in collections as early as 1984, four years before Paul’s work) that Wilson specifically encouraged them to focus on that body of lore (Raymer 3, Dixon i, Kelley i). When voices are not heard in ethnographic research, often it is not that researchers are maliciously hegemonic, but since they are human, they have limited time and resources and cannot collect all the “voices” of a culture. Such a fact argues for many perspectives and for dialogue among them. In making conclusions about Mormon missionaries, Wilson initially disregarded the experience of some of the members of the culture, albeit a group that could be argued as having a marginal position in Mormon mission culture.

**Examples of Reflexive Mormon Ethnography**

Thus far, this thesis has dealt with how well Mormon folklorists have described Mormon culture and has introduced the concept of reflexive ethnography as a way to better cultural representation. The rest of this chapter will put the two parts together and examine how reflexivity could be applied to the work on Mormon folklore, and it will address some of the benefits and drawbacks of such a move.

In asserting that reflexive methodologies should be applied to Mormon folklore

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26 Harrison, Rhonda Jones, and Grant have collections of female missionary folklore in the BYU Archives as do Paul, Raymer, Kelley, and Dixon.
It is plain to see that there are examples of reflexivity already in some folklore texts. A few examples will have to suffice. One example of reflexivity in the traditional canon of Mormon folklore studies is in the preface to the Fifes’ *Saints of Sage and Saddle*. There the Fifes admit some of their own world view and explain that it made a difference in their creation of the book:

> To the extent that the mere act of collecting, arranging, and describing Mormon folklore established us as judges of society, we hope that our opinions have been sober, honest, and impartial. Our roots are in the soil of this culture, however much they have been nourished by a mulch from the humanistic tradition. This work is an effort to cultivate the plant, not to uproot it. (xii)

This is an example of reflexivity in that the Fifes acknowledge that their research has made them "judges" of the culture. As such, they seem to feel that they should acknowledge how they relate to their own work, and this approach corresponds to Elaine Lawless’s, James Clifford’s, and George Marcus’s forms of reflexivity. Both *Holy Women* and *Writing Culture* begin with statements of the author’s relation to the subject matter. Clifford explains the process of the book’s production (viii. 19-26), and Lawless clearly sets forth her views on religion before dealing with a religious subject (xi-xiii). However, although the Fife’s preface contains a trace of reflexivity, it is not detailed enough to be a great help to the reader wondering how the Fifes felt about the Mormonism that they describe in their book. Much more could be written. in non-metaphorical terms, like the fact that Austin (and perhaps Alta as well) began work on the project "with a chip on his shoulder" against Mormonism or Mormon culture (Wilson,
Interview).

A contemporary of the Fifes that fulfills reflexive theory admirably is sociologist Thomas O’Dea. In 1957, O’Dea published a book titled, *The Mormons*, which describes Mormon theology, secular life, and history. O’Dea, who was not a Mormon, writes in his preface "It has been said that Mormonism is one of those complex human phenomena that are extremely difficult, if not impossible to write about with anything resembling fairness and this is especially the case for an outsider" (vii). To deal with this prospect, O’Dea works to "combine intellectual objectivity with intelligent human sympathy" (vii) in his writing. The idea of sympathy corresponds with Eliason’s suggestion of humility below and suggests a helpful characteristic of reflexivity, a sense of ethics or morality associated with academic inquiry. The greatest strength from a reflexive standpoint, however, of O’Dea’s work is his concluding chapter where he addresses challenges and conflicts in the Mormon culture he has immersed himself in. The chapter’s subheads describe well some of the conflicts that make Mormon culture dynamic (and that would challenge the members of the culture). They include, among others, "The Mormon Encounter with Modern Secular Thought," "Authority and Obedience versus Democracy and Individualism," "Plural Marriage and the Change of Doctrine," and "Family Ideals versus Equality of Women." His choice of pointing out such areas of conflict was insightful both in the topics he saw as significant and in the fact that he would acknowledge the complex and dynamic nature of culture.

Eric Eliason’s work on the pioneers and Mormon culture also shows reflexivity. In his conclusion he argues for a more reflexive attitude for scholars who approach what
they regard as an "invented tradition" in a culture: "Rather than regarding invented tradition and identities as pathological false consciousness, we can view them as creative cultural responses to new situations" ("Pioneers and Recapitulation" 205). This perspective will enable researchers to avoid "applying historiographic assumptions . . . to groups whose goals and truth claims are of little relevance to those held by the observing culture" (205). Here and in subsequent passages, Eliason argues that the culture and the researcher often have differing purposes in the ethnographic project and operate under a different set of assumptions and goals. Eliason finally suggests that researchers (in this case those dealing with Mormon culture) "humbly [try] to grasp the Mormon version of their pioneer heritage on their own terms and occasionally [let] the Mormons speak for themselves" (205). Among other things, Eliason is opening up the ethnographic process to include the voice of the culture. He also enjoins researchers to analyze why their work takes the form it does. Both projects are part of a reflexive approach to ethnography.

Finally, Wilson also includes a form of reflexivity by giving a voice to the cultural insider. Many examples of this could be shown, and often that insider voice is his own. This inclusion of insider interpretations enhances the ethnography. There is one type of missionary story that is difficult to reconcile with the image of missionaries as Christian ministers. Often missionaries tell stories of harm coming on those who reject them. Wilson, in dealing with these stories, writes,

I do not admire the sentiments expressed in these stories, but as a former missionary who has been spat upon, reviled, and abused in sundry ways by people I only wanted to help, I understand them. I still remember standing on doorsteps
after being stung by cruel, biting rejections and muttering to myself. "Just wait, lady, Comes the judgement, you'll get yours." (24).

Here Wilson steps away from his academic persona to explain the contextual frame for understanding a story. Such a deviation blatantly proclaims that Wilson is a Mormon and thus clarifies how his background is coloring the text. Some will fault Wilson for being an apologist for Mormonism in including comments like this. Wilson himself acknowledges that religious insiders who write about their own culture "easily lapse into apologetics or proselyting." But even with that tendency, Wilson contends that it is a "risk we must take" ("Folklore, a Mirror" 20). This risk is justified because of the potential benefits of having an insider voice making interpretations that are more authentic.

**New Directions in Mormon Ethnography**

Despite these examples there is a need for more reflexivity in the rhetoric and methodology of Mormon folklore scholarship. Much of the latest work from Wilson looks at the canon of Mormon folklore studies and argues why it does not act as an accurate mirror for Mormon culture. For example, in a *Western Folklore* issue dedicated to reflexivity, Wilson questions "the ethnographic descriptions . . . I have written over the past twenty years as I have tried, as a participating Mormon, to better understand myself and the culture that has produced me" ("Folklore, a Mirror" 13). The article continues as a reflexive analysis by Wilson of his own work. He writes, "I am concerned with the role I have played over the years in fostering . . . misconceptions" (15). He concludes that much
of what folklorists are expected to write about is the fantastic. In Mormon folklore this includes Three Nephite stories and traditional stories of visions, revelations and miracles. Yet, Wilson contends that by solely focusing on these stories a folklorist will misrepresent Mormon culture, a culture that also believes in charitable acts and other things that are less fantastic; Mormons tell stories about these as well and more often. Wilson concludes with a call for further reflexivity in Mormon folklore scholarship by arguing that if we do not avoid inauthentic ethnography,

we will have devoted our lives to the study of the non-essential; we will, in the final analysis, have studied something other than what really exists and will have missed the religious emotional cores whose elucidation is the principle justification for our investigations.

It remains for us, then, to have the courage at last to let our people speak for themselves, unhindered by the shackling preconceptions of scholars or, worse yet, the journal editors for whom we must write. ("Folklore. a Mirror" 20)

Wilson picks up this theme elsewhere. In another essay he points out that the focus on the supernatural is not the only influence hurting the representations of Mormon culture in ethnography. He also contends that geographic determinism and the conception of Mormons as Westerners (in Frederick Jackson Turner’s mold) lead to folklorists’ misunderstanding Mormon culture. Such theories shift the focus from the faith that drives Mormon culture to the environment. They also cast Mormonism in a stereotypical role that never applied to Utah Mormons and disregard the experience of Mormons outside of Utah. Wilson points out that "If we are ever to understand Mormons by examining their
folklore, we must turn our eyes from the past to the present. from the rural landscape to urban centers, and from the West in general to the faith and commitment that give unity and direction to Mormon life" ("The Concept of the ‘West’" 17). With this and other articles, one of Wilson’s major themes of the past few years is that folklorists could do better in representing culture, a conclusion growing out of a reflexive critique of the Mormon folklore canon.

**Reflexivity and Mormon Criticism**

This discussion of the state of Mormon folklore scholarship relates to similar controversies in other areas of Mormon studies. One of the important debates in Mormon letters has been between Richard Cracroft and Bruce Jorgensen over what should be considered Mormon literature. They take opposite sides on the issue, the mantic and the sophic, respectively. Cracroft argues from the mantic perspective, saying that much LDS literature does not reflect the values of the culture it is written for and that it alienates its readers. He contends that good Mormon literature, to be Mormon, should reflect the values of Mormons "whose lives are informed by and whose values are centered in a personal, *dynamic* theology of momentary supernal expectation; men and women who, in the face of an overwhelmingly secular society consciously cultivate ‘a sense of God in their lives’" (52; italics in original).

On the other hand, Jorgensen’s sophic position objects to such a narrow definition of Mormon literature and argues that, although we may encounter wickedness, the Christian and therefore Mormon approach to literature should be more accepting. He cites
the scripture that "some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2), and proposes that being open to all sorts of literature, a Mormon can meet "angels" through reading. He argues that "Reading literature is risky, as living in Western culture, in America, in Provo, at BYU in the 1990s is risky. So we read and discuss literature in class, which is also risky, but which may help us to be more critical–and more merciful–'readers' of the culture we live in" ("To Tell and Hear Stories" 60; italics in original).

In the midst of this heated debate, Gideon Burton has written to try to reconcile the two sides. His solution takes the middle ground between the two: "the two positions which Cracroft and Jorgensen represent–fidelity to the Mormon mythos and openness to otherness–become complementary and mutually interdependent necessities" (228). The focus of this thesis does not concern itself so much with what Mormon literature is, but Burton expands the issue into what Mormon criticism should be, and he opens space for both positions. both Cracroft’s call for authentic Mormon voices and Jorgensen’s Christian hospitality for all voices.

In this sense, reflexivity lends itself to work with Mormon folklore because of its similarities with Burton’s definition of Mormon criticism as defined by Burton. Reflexivity, like Jorgensen’s position, calls for a listening ear and an open mind. It encourages multivocalness and including the voice of the marginalized because it is those voices that make ethnography more complete and more useful. On the other hand, like Cracroft’s position, reflexivity calls for greater description of what culture is actually like and calls for descriptions of culture that the culture itself would recognize and sanction. This is the position Wilson has been arguing in some of his most recent articles. Both of
these projects fall within the realm of reflexivity and Mormon criticism, and they build off one another.

A Pragmatic Mormon Reflexivity

The problem becomes applying the theory to practice. Chapter One pointed out that a purely reflexive project implodes under the weight of postmodern theory. What then are practical ways to increase the reflexivity and authenticity of cultural descriptions in Mormon folklore studies? Reflexive theory can be implemented in several ways. Wilson himself suggests one and other researchers have provided additional models of ways to make Mormon folklore scholarship more closely correspond to the realities that exist in the Mormon culture.

One way to re-envision Mormon ethnography is to include the voices of more of the participants in culture. As noted above, someone unfamiliar with Mormon culture would, upon reading much of the literature, conclude that Mormons only live in the Western United States and on farms. In reality, Mormon culture exists in many more places. Ethnographies should be written on how Mormons in Russia, in Thailand, in Mongolia, or in Ghana balance their Mormon culture with the culture of other groups. For example, someone could write about the ways Chilean Mormons adapt western American culture (which often comes with the Church influence) to their own Chilean cultural norms. Or someone could write about the mixing of cultures in Mormon wards. For example, some London wards have members come in western cultural dress. suits and dresses; some in Ghanian traditional dress; and some in Levi jeans. The members may
have come from Nigeria, India, Ireland, and America. Such situations provide a researcher to see Mormon subcultures relating to one another. Such an international focus would go a long way to dispel the notion of Mormonism as a "Great Basin Kingdom."

Several researchers are working in areas like this. Grant Underwood is publishing an article explaining the reason many Maoris accepted Mormonism in New Zealand. The conversions occurred because the coming of the Mormon missionaries had been prophesied in the Maori culture. Thus, the Maoris who accepted Mormonism could do so without rejecting their own culture. (Underwood). Underwood's work on this subject is important in the way it explores Mormon culture in a non-western U.S. context. Eric A. Eliason and Gary Browning are planning a similar project, one dealing with Russian Mormon culture. This simple act of researchers writing about aspects other than the Utah Mormon culture is an act of reflexivity. Noticing the fallacious assumption that a Mormon is always from Utah or Arizona, such a researcher is striving to better represent a fuller picture of Mormon culture, and this picture requires multiple perspectives.

In addition to presenting views of Mormon culture outside of the United States, authentic ethnographies will admit the voice of all participants in the Mormon culture, both in America and aborad. Mormons are male and female, urban and agrarian, active and less active, highly educated and less educated, superstitious and rational, and a myriad of other things (and all shades in between these binaries). However, often some Mormons are not given an adequate voice. Danette Paul's research of sister missionary folklore is a reaction to this. Margaret Brady has also been taking up the subject of Mormon women in her folkloric work including her article "Transformations of Power:
Mormon Women’s Visionary Narratives." There have also been other studies that publicize the quieter voices in Mormon culture. Brunvand has written an important article on Mormon "jokelore" that differs from Wilson’s work on Mormon humor in including "gentile" jokes about Mormons. The effect is that jack-Mormon jokes are revealed as well as the jokes active Mormons tell.

There are other avenues for the marginalized voices of Mormon culture to speak. Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought has also provided a space for the voices of the non-mainstream Mormons, although their writings are often only marginally ethnographic. There could also be studies of the culture among other subgroups in Mormonism, like young, single adults, church employees, ex-Catholic members, Fijian members, and the list goes on. Obviously the implication of this line of reasoning calls for an impossible amount of perspectives to be viewed. On the other hand, it also provides for endless opportunities of research.

Another way to implement reflexivity into Mormon ethnography is through methodology. As pointed out earlier, Elaine Lawless’ work with reciprocal ethnography is valuable, for one, because instead of theorizing about reflexivity she develops a reflexive methodology. Her book Holy Women is the fruit of her attempts to give voice to the culture and to acknowledge her own biases. The book contains ten lengthy life stories of her informants and, interspersed among those voices is Lawless’s interpretations and negotiations with the women she writes about. Such a methodology, which focuses on listening, negotiating, and acknowledging difference, has interesting potential when applied to Mormon ethnography. For instance, one could study a subgroup in the
Mormon culture and reveal the negotiations and areas of conflict between the two groups.

This type of methodology applies well to Mormon culture because it opens the door for dialogue when the tendency is to shun or totalize. An example of this tendency has been described by Leonard Arrington, who found that when his *Great Basin Kingdom* was catalogued by the Church Historian’s Office, it had an "a" added to the cataloguing card. The "a" signified that it was an anti-Mormon, presumably because it sought objectivity instead of being simply an affirmation of Mormonism (75). As a reaction against this type of totalization, reflexive methodology opens the door for open debate and for the free exchange of cultural descriptions.

One final possible way of making Mormon ethnography authentic through reflexivity is by following Wilson’s call to deal with the more subtle folklore of the Mormon culture. Wilson is encouraging others to pick up on this work and do more collecting and writing on such subjects (Personal Conversation). Perhaps Wilson’s best articulation of this perspective is in his most recent American Folklore Society Conference presentation. In the address, Wilson quotes two of the most famous Mormon folklore stories (and stories Wilson has written about elsewhere): the child falling in the canal while the mother is at the temple and the missionaries stranded in the snow storm who are saved by one of the Three Nephites. Wilson then reinterprets them, still in a functionalist perspective but with an emphasis on how these stories encourage the practice of religion, not how they reflect or affect the beliefs of Mormons. The result gives a deeper view of Mormon culture because it shows the stories to be calls for action: calls for greater temple service and for missionary service (8).
Wilson’s encouragement can be fulfilled by collecting stories about humanitarian, temple, and church service, stories which “have seldom been collected and less often studied” ("Teach Me All” 5). These stories are told much more often in Mormon circles. For instance, recently in a church meeting a class member told the following story of service. It was shared in a church meeting discussing ways to use money righteously.

There was a returned missionary who years ago went to a poorer country. He kept in touch with some of the people there. Years later, when a family the missionary had known wanted to send their child on a mission, they didn’t have enough money, so they contacted the returned missionary and asked him to help out financially. He had just had financed two of his own sons’ missions yet he immediately agreed to pay for this family’s child’s mission.

Such a story, according to Wilson’s analysis, not only shows that Mormons believe in charity, but gives an example to recount and to follow.

Wilson’s encouragement is a form of reflexivity in that cultural insiders and ethnographers look at the canon of Mormon folklore and see the dissonance between the culture and the cultural description. When one studies the less dramatic, one lets more of the Mormon voice be heard because those stories are told at least as much and probably more than the dramatic and the supernatural. Wilson concludes: "Though more pedestrian in character than dramatic supernatural tales, these stories take us much closer to the core of Mormon moral and humane values than the supernatural stories ever will. In studying Mormon folklore, we neglect them at our peril" ("Teach Me All" 10).
An Evaluation of Mormon Reflexivity

In this thesis, I have argued that adopting reflexivity would provide for more accurate and authentic pictures of the Mormon culture, especially by providing more perspectives of the complicated Mormon cultures. However, promoting reflexivity is not a panacea for all the ills of ethnography and cultural misrepresentation. Although reflexive ethnography would improve some of the tendencies of Mormon ethnography's misrepresentations, it would also face challenges and produce drawbacks.

Because reflexivity requires ambiguity and negotiation, members of Mormon culture who are unwilling to negotiate may not accept it. In a sense, although it can be a viable mode of Mormon theory, reflexivity may utilize a language and methodology that sounds inauthentic to Mormon culture. It would be an unfortunate irony that the theory producing more representative ethnography was doing it in a manner that was foreign to the culture and which alienated the insiders. In the end, reflexive texts require reflexive audiences, just as any folklore analysis, to be appreciated. requires a readership who understands the definitions of folklore. The danger is of alienating the culture, however, driving further wedges between the intellectual and mainstream factions in Mormon culture. One further attack on reflexivity could arise from a perception that it is an attack on past works and is anti-canonical (both of which are easy traps to fall into for reflexive researchers). However, if approached correctly, reflexivity can be seen as revisionist and building on past work instead of replacing it. In the end, reflexivity must be seen in terms of marginal costs and marginal benefits. And the benefits outweigh the costs.
Conclusion

In concluding this examination of Mormon ethnography, the words of Joseph Smith once again apply to the subject. Joseph Smith revealed in the King Follett address, given a few months before his death, that "You don’t know me; you never knew my heart. No man knows my history" (290). This cryptic pronouncement has been seen as the closing words of a man who knew he would soon die. But it can also apply to ethnography; it shows how meeting the Other often results in confusion and misinterpretation. Joseph Smith’s words can be applied to Mormon ethnography.

Mormon culture, as the Other, is often misunderstood and portrayed in ways that portions of its culture disagree with. Indeed, any attempt to definitively say what Mormon culture is will totalize and will conceal portions of the culture. Reflexivity seeks, in essence, to help ethnographers minimize this totalization and concealment by making sure that multiple voices are heard and that authoritative pronouncements on culture are shown not to be authoritative only because they come from an author. There is no final word on Mormon culture—only an ongoing conversation that hopefully produces insights on the culture. Coming back to Joseph Smith, he went on to say in the King Follett address that he would never attempt to tell his history (290). But perhaps we can tell, not his history, but rather about the culture that he founded.
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Appendix

Chronological Bibliography of Austin and Alta Fife's and
William A. Wilson's Mormon Folklore Writings

Austin and Alta Fife


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"Virginia Folkways from a Mormon Journal." Western Folklore 9 (1950): 348-58.

27The following is a bibliography of both Austin and Alta Fife's and William A. Wilson's writings that focus on Mormon culture or Mormon folklore topics. The references for the Fifes are adapted from a bibliography on pages 273-75 of Exploring Western Americana. Wilson's bibliography is adapted from a bibliography provided by him.

28Although some of the following articles were published under Austin's name alone, in recognition of Alta's contribution's to the work, I will make not distinction between those published with and without her name.
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