1998

Editor's Introduction: In the Land of the Lotus-Eaters

Daniel C. Peterson

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

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol10/iss1/2
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Editor’s Introduction: In the Land of the Lotus-Eaters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author(s)</td>
<td>Daniel C. Peterson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISSN</td>
<td>1099-9450 (print), 2168-3123 (online)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>Introduction to the current issue, including editor’s picks. Peterson explores the world of anti-Mormon writing and fiction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Editor’s Introduction: 
In the Land of the Lotus-Eaters

Daniel C. Peterson

We are the persecuted children of God—the chosen of the Angel Merona. . . . We are of those who believe in those sacred writings, drawn in Egyptian letters on plates of beaten gold, which were handed unto the holy Joseph Smith at Palmyra.

— Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, A Study in Scarlet

For years, I have marveled at the luxuriant, even rank, growth that is anti-Mormonism. The imaginative richness, the aggressive hostility, the fractured reasoning, the historical illiteracy, the sheer oddity of many of the loudest anti-Mormons is for me a thing of wonder. Their endless stream of tracts offers some of the exoticism of a journey through the uncharted jungles of nineteenth-century Africa.

A portion of that—and, I hope, something of the fun of it all—has been chronicled in this Review. I myself have reported on the goofball allegations of Mr. J. Edward (“God Makers”) Decker and the incomparable Loftes Tryk, as well as on the malevolent distortions penned by Dr. John Ankerberg and Dr. Dr. John Weldon. And the well is not yet dry. A new psychological

---

2 In a brief review of Ankerberg and Weldon’s Behind the Mask of Mormonism, Rev. Dennis A. Wright of Utah Missions, Inc., who may also be a fan of Stephen King and Edgar Allan Poe, describes it as both “intriguing” and “perhaps somewhat frightening.” “This volume is heavily annotated,” he reports, “and will prove to be a major resource for students of the Mormon Religion.” See Dennis A. Wright, “Book Reviews,” The Evangel 45/2 (March/April
explanation for the Book of Mormon has just appeared on my doorstep that, if first impressions hold, may push Trykian psycho-
analysis even beyond the outer limits where it now resides.\textsuperscript{3} Loftes Tryk triumphs.

Not all anti-Mormon writing is amusing, of course. Not all is sweetness and light in the weird subculture of the critics.\textsuperscript{4} But even Sandra Tanner, a generally stolid figure from the comparatively respectable branch of the anti-Mormon industry, in thinking of whom the word \textit{whimsical} does not instantly come to mind, is capable of flights of inspired wackiness. Her recent declaration, pronounced in a video officially produced and currently distributed by the Southern Baptist Convention, that the faith of the Latter-day Saints is as much Hindu as Christian—an assertion issued with all the confidence of the competent Indologist that she is not—is a bit of drollery worthy of Ed Decker himself.\textsuperscript{5}

Many of our critics should, really, be exempted from the rigid standards of logic and evidence that hold sway in genuine scholarship. For they are actually writing \textit{fiction}, and all we can ask is that they write it entertainingly and well, with an aura of what English professors like to call \textit{verisimilitude}.\textsuperscript{6} Sir Arthur Conan Doyle did so, in the story that introduced Sherlock Holmes to the world.


\textsuperscript{4} See, for instance, the recent attempts by certain professional anti-Mormons to excuse Lilburn Boggs’s “extermination order” and the mob murder of Joseph Smith. These are discussed in this volume of the \textit{Review}, on pages 85–93.

\textsuperscript{5} See Daniel C. Peterson’s review of the SBC materials in this volume of the \textit{Review}, 12–96.

\textsuperscript{6} Hugh Nibley, \textit{Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass: The Art of Telling Tales about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young}, ed. David J. Whittaker (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), represents (at over 700 pages) the most extensive appreciation of anti-Mormon ingenuity in print. Unfortunately, though, Professor Nibley labors under the misimpression that the people he discusses think their works depict actual reality. Once one realizes that most anti-Mormon literature is a species of creative writing, it appears in a wholly different light.
Consider the meticulous research that lies behind the following passage, permitting Sir Arthur such uncanny insight into Mormon speech patterns and ecclesiastical organization. “What,” his version of Brigham Young demands,

is the thirteenth rule in the code of the sainted Joseph Smith? “Let every maiden of the true faith marry one of the Elect; for if she wed a Gentile, she commits a grievous sin.” . . .

Upon this one point your whole faith shall be tested—so it has been decided in the Sacred Council of Four.7

Passages like this have given great pleasure to my children since I introduced A Study in Scarlet to them several years ago. Listening to a tape of the story during a trip to Canada certainly helped to pass the time, as we laughed till our sides ached whenever the story touched upon “the chosen of the Angel Merona.” Furthermore, “the Sacred Council of Four” has a delightful tinge of Gothic horror to it. One imagines incense and hooded priests meeting in decayed medieval crypts. It is better than “the halcyon council of fifty,” a phrase given to us in the seventies by Peter Bart’s deservedly forgotten paranoid novel, Thy Kingdom Come. It is much to be preferred over Rüdiger Hauth’s too colloquial recent description of the church’s leadership—based on his alleged field research on actual Mormon speech in Utah—as “the Big Fifteen.”8 (Who could possibly work himself into a pleasurable hysteria about sacerdotal tyranny on the basis of so obviously childish a title?) Our debt to Sir Arthur is incalculable.

Unfortunately, though, very little anti-Mormon literature maintains this high quality. For instance, John L. Smith’s 1969 fantasy yarn, Brigham Smith: A Novel—one of the few anti-Mormon books to openly acknowledge its fictional character—is almost stupefyingly dull.9 Its didacticism is unspeakably tedious,

---

7 Conan Doyle, A Study in Scarlet, 89.
it’s characters wooden. Another species of anti-Mormon writing, the relatively unknown Chick publications, literally comprises comic books with little in the way of literary pretension. Besides, apart from their amusing little tract entitled “The Visitors,” the Chick people have clearly put most of their energy into their anti-Catholic comic line—including “The Death Cookie” (dealing with the Eucharist) and their memorable series about “Alberto.” (“As a Jesuit priest, it was his job to infiltrate Protestant churches. But when he read the Bible, he saw that Catholicism couldn’t save him... After his conversion, Alberto became a hunted man. No Jesuit can leave his order... and live!”)¹⁰

Not all specimens in the genre are so bad, of course. Ed Decker, James Spencer, and Bill Schnoebelen—who, I would judge, have brought a sensibility formed on the Ghostbusters movies to their writings—have placed several successful products on the anti-Mormon market. Mr. Decker has even created a hit pseudo-documentary film and, for a time at least, franchised his “Saints Alive in Jesus” chain to anti-Mormon zealots across North America. Loftes Tryk may have authored the most hilarious anti-Mormon spoof ever written.¹¹

Janis Hutchinson’s recent The Mormon Missionaries uses a simple but readable story format to introduce her fans to a world from which all cogent Latter-day Saint arguments have been miraculously erased.¹² Judging from the frequency with which this motif occurs, I suppose that such escapist romances—in which infallibly brilliant cult-busters handily defeat craven, stupid Mormons—serve an important psychological function for some writers and readers. They are rather like the old Doc Savage adventure novels, which enthralled me for several weeks during my

---

¹⁰ The Chick publications are featured, along with many other anti-Mormon, anti-Catholic, and anti-just-about-everybody-else materials, in the Bible Baptist Bookstore: Catalogue 1998, which emerges from Pensacola, Florida.


preteen years. There can be little question among careful observers, for example, that the self-educated but devastatingly capable Baptist preacher who brings Brigham Smith, an oddly uncommitted (fictional) member of the Quorum of the Twelve, to Protestant fundamentalism is John L. Smith’s own Walter Mitty-ish self-projection.¹³

But the quality of even the most diverting recent anti-Mormon offerings is, at best, uneven. Consider some representative specimens: The Evangel, the monthly “newspaper” distributed by Oklahoma-based Utah Missions, Inc., is uproariously funny, but subtlerate. (Moreover, as I write, The Evangel has been taken over by new management, and nervous fans are uncertain whether its legendary capacity for self-parody will survive.) The Tanners’ newsletter is earnest but almost always (even when dealing with supposed satanic ritual abuse) a bit soporific. By contrast, the entertaining 1995 volume entitled Decker’s Complete Handbook on Mormonism thrills its readers with warnings against the Latter-day Saints’ sinister scheme to set up “a political kingdom, not a spiritual one.”¹⁴

They believe it is their destiny to seize the reins of power in America and turn it into a theocracy, a religious dictatorship, led by a prophet-king who would be the supreme earthly head of the Melchizedek priesthood. . . . Should the Mormons ever succeed in

---

¹³ In his recently self-published autobiography, Rev. Smith tells many tales about his easy triumphs over Latter-day Saint professors and missionaries, and even over the president of the Council of the Twelve (who “literally frothed at the mouth” at Rev. Smith’s irrefutable brilliance). See John L. Smith, The Extraordinary Life and Ministry of an Ordinary Preacher! (Marlow, Okla.: Utah Missions, Inc., 1997). 50–52, 62–65. An entire chapter of the autobiography (p. 74) boasts about how “two Brigham Young University professors with earned doctor’s degrees wrote a 255 page book about me in 1992. . . . The book, Offenders for a Word, mentions The Utah Evangel, The Evangel, Utah Missions, Inc., John L. Smith (Rev. Smith, etc.) by name 159 times (my count).” For those who have actually seen Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1992), no comment on this bit of self-delusion is needed. (Those who haven’t read it should repent.)

creating their church-state...they might...criminalize soul-winning efforts by Bible-believing Christians.\(^\text{15}\)

The \textit{Handbook} even furnishes titillating evidence to back up its charges: "There have been rumors of 'special assignments' being handled for the LDS leaders by faithful FBI agents. These agents can be rewarded upon retirement from the agency with well-paying jobs in the church's 'private army,' the LDS Church Security."\(^\text{16}\) And there is (at least, within the fictional world invented by the Mr. Decker) nineteenth-century historical proof for this, too. "Though today LDS leaders will deny it," the \textit{Handbook} informs its audience, "there were marauding bands of theocratic vigilantes known as 'Danites' or 'Avenging Angels'—almost a Mormon Ku Klux Klan—who would often exact fearsome retribution upon any who were seen to be out of order with the rulers of the church."\(^\text{17}\)

This is not bad writing. As imaginative literature, it is far superior to \textit{The Evangel} or the Utah Lighthouse newsletter. And it illustrates wonderfully the contention of Professor Terryl Givens, in his recent Oxford-published book on anti-Mormon rhetoric, that enemies of the church residing in America, a nation that prides itself on religious tolerance, have frequently been obliged to remove Mormonism from "the sphere of religion"—to make it something political or even criminal—in order to justify their hostility.\(^\text{18}\) But it doesn't terrify. It is too abstract. It doesn't have

\(^\text{15}\) Ibid., 187.
\(^\text{16}\) Ibid., 149.
\(^\text{17}\) Ibid., 119; compare 132, 166–67. There are undoubtedly people who actually believe this stuff—although I strongly suspect that Mr. Decker himself does not. In two fascinating books, Daniel Pipes has looked at similar thinking elsewhere. See Daniel Pipes, \textit{The Hidden Hand}: \textit{Middle East Fears of Conspiracy} (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); \textit{Conspiracy}: \textit{How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From} (New York: Free Press, 1997). Anti-Mormon conspiracy fantasists, and the demagogues who manipulate them, also deserve the attention of historians and social psychologists.

\(^\text{18}\) Terryl L. Givens, \textit{The Viper on the Hearth}: \textit{Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Not only fundamentalist Protestants resort to such characterization. Consider the case of John B. Wright, \textit{Rocky Mountain Divide}: \textit{Selling and Saving the West} (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993). Prof. Wright, a geographer and environmen-
the specificity, the concrete detail, that would make it truly effective as fiction. Consider, by contrast, the following very effective bit of writing from Conan Doyle:

Strange rumours began to be bandied about—rumours of murdered immigrants and rifled camps in regions where Indians had never been seen. Fresh women appeared in the harems of the Elders—women who pined and wept, and bore upon their faces the traces of an unextinguishable horror. Belated wanderers upon the mountains spoke of gangs of armed men, masked, stealthy, and noiseless, who flitted by them in the darkness. These tales and rumours took substance and shape, and were corroborated and corroborated, until they resolved themselves into a definite name. To this day, in the lonely ranches of the West, the name of the Danite Band, or the Avenging Angels, is a sinister and an ill-omened one.19

One can almost see the Danites, feel their knives against one’s throat. Granted, this passage, like that from Decker’s Handbook, is based on nothing but paranoid rumors and a creative imagination. Nonetheless, it makes the imaginary Danites as tangible as they will ever be. Zane Grey’s classic Western yarn Riders of the Purple Sage and Stephen White’s contemporary potboiler Higher Authority could also serve as models for anti-Mormon novelists in the paranoid style.20 Sometimes a bit of half-digested fact can be transformed into a horrifying tale, like a grain of sand in an oyster. Here, for instance, is a very recent excerpt taken from San Francisco’s Vzglyad: Weekly Russian Language Newspaper. The article was apparently inspired by a minor incident or two...

19 Conan Doyle, A Study in Scarlet, 87.
involving a small gang of militant adolescent vegetarian animal
rights activists. The Mormons, in other words.

**Mormons Move for Attack**

Residents of the American city of Salt Lake City
are being subjected to real terror at the hands of the
Mormon sect. Using clubs, knives, bottles with flamma-
able liquids and homemade bombs, the Mormons are
attempting to convert residents of the city to the “true
faith.” As fervent opponents of alcohol and to-
bacco—and some of them are also zealous vegetari-
ans—the Mormons are storming bars and meat mar-
kets. They are calling themselves soldiers fighting
against the worldly vices. One of the most widespread
methods of intimidation is the so-called “stone sand-
wich.” This is when they place the victim face down on
the pavement and kick the back of his head with their
boots. As has been reported by representatives of the
local police force, which has had to intervene often of-
late in the conflicts involving sect members, after such
torture many people fear going to bars. And several
even lose altogether the desire to eat meat or smoke.21

The aspiring fictionalist must appear to actually believe what
he or she is creating. One of the most effective passages in Kurt
Van Gorden’s *Mormonism* is a footnote in which he describes
how, after opponents of the church murdered the Prophet Joseph
Smith on 27 June 1844, the eight witnesses to the Book of Mor-
mon all followed the schismatic pretender James J. Strang. Real
history, of course, knows that this was impossible. Christian Whit-
mer had succumbed to a chronic infection in 1835. Peter Whitmer
Jr. died of tuberculosis in 1836. Joseph Smith Sr. passed away in
1840. Hyrum Smith died moments before his brother Joseph in a
hail of anti-Mormon bullets. In other words, four of the eight wit-
tnesses could not possibly have followed Strang after Joseph
Smith’s death, since they predeceased the Prophet.

21 *Vzglyad: Weekly Russian Language Newspaper* (13–19 February
1998): 4. I am grateful to Prof. William J. Hamblin for bringing this valuable
item to my attention.
Samuel Smith, it is true, outlived Joseph. But there seems to have been little time or opportunity for him to have affiliated himself with the Strangites in Voree, Wisconsin, for, as a result of a fever contracted while fleeing an anti-Mormon mob and recovering the bodies of his two older brothers, he died at Nauvoo on 30 July 1844, just slightly more than a month after Joseph and Hyrum. (Strang did not even make his claim to church leadership until August.) Hiram Page lived until 1852, but, with his Whitmer in-laws, had severed his ties to the church by 1838. He spent the remaining years of his life in Missouri. Jacob Whitmer, likewise alienated from the church, worked as a shoemaker and farmer in Richmond, Missouri, until his death in 1856. John Whitmer lived until 1878, but he too had separated himself from the church in 1838, and thereafter he lived and died in Missouri. Neither Hiram Page nor Jacob Whitmer nor John Whitmer seems to have moved to James Strang’s colony at Voree, nor to the more famous later headquarters of the group at Beaver Island.

Such chronological problems would obviously be fatal to a work of genuine history. But they are entirely acceptable in certain kinds of fiction. Captain Kirk and Mr. Spock are free to walk the streets of twentieth-century San Francisco; Bill and Ted can have an excellent adventure with Socrates, St. Joan of Arc, and Napoleon. We must be careful to judge anti-Mormon literature by the standards appropriate to it. An epic is not a bad lyric poem because it is too long, just as an opera is not a poorly written symphony because it has singing and a plot. Epics and operas are essentially different from lyric poems and symphonies, with their own rules. So, too, theological fantasy literature is not to be rejected solely because of wild inaccuracies.

Mr. Van Gorden stands behind his footnote.

Even academics at respectable universities have entered into the writing of Mormon fiction. Alan Wolfe, a sociologist at Boston University, composed an article for the 23 February 1998 issue of The New Republic that summons us into a parallel universe, where the Latter-day Saints, who are typically castigated among intellectualoids as crypto-fascists seeking to impose their reactionary values on everybody else, are dismissed as devotees of a
“weightless spirituality.”22 In parts of his essay, Prof. Wolfe sounds rather like an evangelical countercultist, denouncing Joseph Smith as “a confidence man,” dismissing Mormons as “obedient automatons,” judging them guilty of “cultspeak,” and falsely accusing them of “lacking a conception of grace.”

But all this is merely conventional. What is distinctive in Prof. Wolfe’s article is far more interesting. He hears echoes of the Unabomber in Stephen Covey. He breaks dramatically with the usual Protestant accusations of “works righteousness” and lets his originality shine when, no doubt to the utter astonishment of most people, he denounces the Latter-day Saints for “their efforts to undermine the moral legitimacy of the nuclear family.” Seeming even to contradict his own edicts on grace, Prof. Wolfe tells New Republic readers that the “morally anarchistic” Latter-day Saints believe themselves to be saved without works.

We have, with the erstwhile sociologist Alan Wolfe, definitely entered the realm of the literary imagination, leaving prosaic things like logic behind. “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds,” said Emerson, “adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do.”23 “Do I contradict myself?” asked Walt Whitman. “Very well then. . . . I contradict myself; I am large. . . . I contain multitudes.”24

Mormons, writes Alan Wolfe, are moral relativists.

The Mormon God was, as we now say, nonjudgmental.

You need not have been of high status to become one

with God. Nor was it important that you led a life free of wrongdoing.25

Rather than holding up to his followers a vision and demanding that they follow it, [Joseph Smith] divined what his followers wanted and offered it to them.26

Americans want to be religious without having to suffer through the denial, the sacrifice, and the hard-boards endurance that religious asceticism demands. Joseph Smith offered them a way to do so. A religion without a conception of sin is, for all its earnestness, non-demanding. Spirit need never stand in the way of success. Joseph Smith was not in the business of building a movement of men of sorrow.27

[He] understood one thing. Take insecure people, offer them an answer to their problems, clothe your advice in language that seems intelligent but is mostly gibberish, proclaim the world rotten yet demand changes that require little or no transformation in how people actually live—and, who knows, maybe you will be called a prophet.28

But this riveting attempt to sketch “a nonjudgmental religion . . . linked to a hierarchical and authoritarian structure”29 simply goes too far. While they may want to believe it, I suspect that most readers lack the tolerance for contradiction that Prof. Wolfe so obviously possesses, and that their willingness to suspend disbelief must simply collapse at so counterintuitive and indeed counterfactual a fantasia. Moreover, it is clear that Alan Wolfe himself senses the problem. “Nonjudgmentalism is usually associated with tolerance,”30 he rather lamely admits, just prior to launching an attack on the Latter-day Saints for suppressing dissident opinions.

---

26 Ibid., 29.
27 Ibid., 30.
28 Ibid., 34.
29 Ibid., 31.
30 Ibid.
So his Mormons are still oppressive fascists, but they are broad-minded ones.

With my colleague Ralph C. Hancock, of Brigham Young University’s Department of Political Science, I sent the following letter to The New Republic:

For readers even modestly familiar with the religion called “Mormonism,” a reply to Alan Wolfe is unnecessary. Beginning with the error-packed first paragraph (from the mistaken reference to “evening prayers” to the final conflation of Book of Mormon translation with the legal organization of the Church), Wolfe’s treatment of basic facts reads like a product of that children’s game in which a faintly whispered message is circulated from ear to ear until its resemblance to the original is just enough to be amusing. And where argument is concerned, the central premise of Wolfe’s tortured interpretation of Mormonism as the weightless and relativistic postmodern religion—i.e., that Covey’s contributions to the popular literature on personal effectiveness somehow provide a key to unlocking the supposed secrets of the Latter-day Saints—is preposterous on its face, as the author once almost acknowledges.

Still, for the sake of any who may be as unfamiliar with Mormonism as Alan Wolfe, allow us to set straight just a few matters that this bizarre article has confused. First is its uninformed equation of “Mormon” with “Utah,” and of both with polygamy. Practicing polygamists are excommunicated from the Church, and have been for well over a century. Moreover, an “intolerant nonjudgmentalism” is not only difficult to imagine, it is utterly impossible to recognize in Mormonism.

But Wolfe’s problems stem largely from his uncritical dependence on John Brooke’s deeply flawed book, The Refiner’s Fire. Brooke knew little about Mormon history and understood less about Mormon doctrine. Thus, New Republic readers are falsely informed that Mormons “reject the possibility of grace”
and are subjected, once again, to Brooke’s fanciful derivation of the cold fusion fiasco from Mormon theology. No doubt some at the resolutely secularist University of Utah would love to blame Mormonism for that embarrassing venture into junk science. Alas, though, Professors Pons and Fleischmann were not Mormon. On the other hand, their earliest and sharpest critic, a physicist at Brigham Young University, is.

Wolfe’s portrayal of Mormonism as a “nondemanding” faith is, simply, ridiculous. Its tithe-paying membership, its monthly fasts, its unpaid clergy and missionaries, the hundreds of settlements its religiously motivated people established in the inhospitable Great Basin and beyond, and the unnumbered graves they left scattered across the Midwest and the Rocky Mountains as they fled mob violence, testify eloquently and irrefutably to the contrary.31

Another writer on Latter-day Saint subjects with an imaginative gift is John B. Wright, who teaches geography at New Mexico State University. Most of Prof. Wright’s fictions are so mundane that one is tempted to dismiss them, at first, merely as errors. When he identifies Sen. Bob Bennett as the governor of Utah, or describes the election of Deedee Corradini, a non-Mormon woman, to the mayoralty of Salt Lake City as unprecedented and an “historic breakdown of Mormon political dominance,” or, in all solemnity, cites the exterior of the Salt Lake Temple as an illustration of “the influence of astrology on the early Church,” his inventive gifts have clearly failed him.32 When he compares the orientation of Mormon temples toward the east to the supposedly similar orientation of “all Muslim mosques,” one is actually embarrassed for him.33 His implicit depiction of Latter-day Saints as quasi-Nazis (via a dubious recollection from Temple Square) and his account of the anti-intellectual tyrannies of the Brethren are merely derivative, whereas his mind-reading of the young Joseph

31 As of this writing, it seems that our letter apparently did not make the cut.
32 Wright, Rocky Mountain Divide, 139, 142.
33 Ibid., 143.
Smith and his narrative of “Walters the magician”—the very possibly mythical occult master whose disciple Joseph is supposed to have been—are but warmed-over Fawn Brodie.34

Disciple to his master, Prof. Wright follows Brodie in telling us precisely what Joseph read and thought at the time he invented the Book of Mormon, as well as in accepting at face value the anti-Mormon affidavits gathered by Philastus Hurlbut. According to Prof. Wright, the Book of Mormon relates the story of Hebrews who came to the New World and promptly split into three groups, the Nephites, the Jaredites, and the Lamanites. Before the Lamanites annihilated the other two factions, these Hebrews had spread throughout North and South America, but had devoted themselves particularly to building forts all over New York State. A central figure in the Book of Mormon is the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl, and several of the Witnesses to the gold plates recanted their testimonies.35

In order to complete his picture of Mormonism, Prof. Wright also shares something of Latter-day Saint history with his readers. Joseph and Hyrum Smith, for instance, were arrested while trying to flee Nauvoo, and, following their deaths, Brigham Young succeeded to “the position of infallible living Prophet.” It was he, says Prof. Wright, who, during the trek westward, introduced the ordinance of proxy baptism for the dead in order to make surviving Mormons feel better about the loss of hundreds of their fellow believers along the trail. Having been vicariously baptized, the souls of these already baptized dead Mormons would be able to “enter Celestial Glory (also known as Zion) or even Exultation [sic].”36

Clearly, Prof. Wright is getting more inventive. But, on the whole, this is not very good stuff. Just when we are about to despair, though, John Wright serves up a pair of unmistakable, if minor, comic gems. He explains that temple garments “are worn by true believers in preparation for the Millennium, when all Gentiles

34 Ibid., 142, 145–46, 152–53, 158. For her landmark discoveries, Prof. Wright tells his readers on page 155, Mrs. Brodie was immediately excommunicated from the church in 1976. (Her supposed “discoveries” were published in 1945.)
36 Ibid., 158–59.
will be struck naked by the Lord, and only Mormons will be spared the embarrassment.”37 And, discussing the Salt Lake Temple, with its statue of the angel Moroni atop the central tower on the east, he tells his enthralled readers that “Conservative Mormons believe that when Christ returns to Earth to usher in His Millennial Kingdom, His first stop will be Salt Lake City. When this blessed event occurs, the statue of the Angel Moroni will spring to life and blow his trumpet to herald the beginning of God’s rule on Earth.”38

And Now for Something Completely Original

There is, clearly, some imaginative and entertaining work going on among critics of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Still, fresh ideas never hurt. And so it is with considerable delight that I here offer a portion of an article from the left-leaning Cairo weekly magazine Rūz al-Yūsuf.39 So far as I am aware, this marks its very first appearance in English. I am confident that some of our anti-Mormon friends, relatively few of whom are completely comfortable in Arabic, will find it an important and useful document, as well as an inspiration to spur them on to yet greater achievements. I offer it to them as a service.

Companies selling delusion seek profit in any form and in any place. Those who believe in fairy tales and are trying to escape the troubles of the world yield themselves to such groups in England and America and India. And, because these people occasionally visit Egypt, or even, by chance, live here, it is only natural that we find propagandists for those fairy tales in our midst, as well as the people who exploit them—whether they are in the pyramid or in al-Ma‘ādī.

37 Ibid., 149.
38 Ibid., 142–43.
39 Ḥamdi al-Ḥusaynī and Suhayr ‘Aṭā, “Diyānāt jadīda fī al-haram wa al-Ma‘ādī,” Rūz al-Yūsuf (16 October 1995). I am grateful to John Gee for locating this item for me in the Sterling Library at Yale University and providing me with a photocopy of it. The translation is mine.
New Sects in the Pyramid and in al-Maˈādī

Sect Center: The “Mormons” in Tel Aviv, while the Egyptian Church Warns against Them

Sitting before the Sphinx, Searching for the Secret Buried beneath It

The Jews Circulate Rumors: Resurrection Day in the Chambers of the Great Pyramid

A cocktail religion, a blend of Christianity and Judaism to which more than 200 American residents of Cairo adhere, practices its strange rites to the tunes of a piano in an elegant villa in the serene neighborhood of al-Maˈādī. Their so-called prophet is alive and dwelling in the state of Utah, the main center of the sect of the “Mormons.” The number of their adherents is growing among the foreigners who live in Egypt.

Their branch in Tel Aviv is responsible for their diffusion in the Middle East. The Cairo branch is secret, despite the passage of more than 15 years since the beginning of its activity in Egypt at the hand of a teacher in the American University in Cairo. The Ministry of the Interior refused their request to practice their religion openly after the Egyptian Church warned against permitting them to proselytize, since they consider them infidels [kāfirūn].

Their first so-called prophet was killed in a New York jail following his arrest on charges of horse thievery. He claimed that an angel named “Mormon” had delivered to him the fanciful teachings of a new sect written upon plates of gold in two languages, Hebrew and ancient Egyptian.

Because of this imagined prophet, and at precisely nine o'clock every Friday morning, the traffic gets a bit snarled on Road 9 in al-Maˈādī, as the proprietor of Villa 16 receives his guests, who arrive steadily until their number reaches about 150 men and women. They know each other well, and no stranger is permitted to enter unless he has received prior permission
from the proprietor of the villa, the representative of the so-called prophet.

This American deputy works for an oil company, and has lived in Egypt for the last fifteen years.

All enter into a spacious, air-conditioned hall, arranged in a half circle of comfortable chairs resembling those in deluxe hotels. Before them is a podium, behind which stands or sits the proprietor of the villa, the representative of the so-called prophet in America. Then hymnals are distributed, and a pretty young woman, the daughter of the villa's proprietor, begins to play the piano in a portion of the room reserved for prayer.

Everybody knows the teachings and sticks to them. Thus smoking is not permitted, because their sect considers it forbidden. Partaking of alcoholic beverages is also prohibited, particularly during hymns. Silence envelops them for more than two consecutive hours, during which they sing strange songs, some of them in English and some of them in the language of the red Indians who lived in the United States before the arrival of the white man. Before the closing of the hymns, two boys, whose ages do not exceed fourteen years, pass by. One of them carries small cups, in which there is a little ordinary water. The second carries small pieces of white bread. And before the hour hand reaches twelve o'clock noon, the piano girl introduces a selection from among their most famous common hymns, indicating the conclusion of the prayers.

Most of the adherents of this fantastic sect are African-Americans, whose women participate half naked in the singing of the hymns.

Dr. Martin Harris, a communications teacher at the American University in Cairo from the midseventies until 1982, was the first to introduce these ideas into Egypt. He was zealous in preaching them and inviting his students to convert, to consider it the ideal sect. After he reached the age of 79, he departed Cairo for the state of Utah, the chief headquarters of the sect of the
“Mormons.” But he continues to be in constant contact with his colleagues in Cairo. Indeed, he visited them and participated in their rites just last May.

Dr. Martin explained to a number of Egyptian youth with whom he met during his latest visit to Egypt the possibility of helping them to obtain permanent residence in the United States and of seeking opportunities for appropriate employment for them—on condition that they declare their acceptance of “Mormonism” and their readiness to work as missionaries for it in various Third World countries in exchange for a sizable sum of money. For the principles of “Mormonism” impose upon every individual above the age of eighteen the duty of spreading these principles and proselytizing on their behalf in every place, but especially in poor countries. They stipulate huge amounts of money specifically for those laboring to spread these principles abroad.

There is a significant connection between the Jewish religion and the “Mormons.” The Israeli government has designated a church for their worship, besides giving them material support both open (e.g., donations from Jews) and covert (e.g., laundering large amounts of money from abroad).

Every “Mormon” who visits Egypt must necessarily also go to the central headquarters in Tel Aviv, for a visit to their temples there, much like a Hajj pilgrimage, cleanses the “Mormon” from whatever sins he has committed throughout his life. This is the reason that the Israeli government has been so enthusiastic about supporting them, considering them a means for attracting tourists.

In 1985, the main headquarters in the state of Utah undertook the translation of their holy book into Arabic, indicating thereby the beginning of their attempt to bring the Arabs into their strange sect. It was printed in the same form and size as the scriptures, under the title *The Mormons . . . A Second Witness for Jesus Christ.*
The history of the appearance of the sect of the "Mormons" goes back to a night in the month of September 1828, when Joseph Smith, a farmboy from a village close to the American city of New York, was performing his usual worship. In an instant of clarity, he beheld the walls of his room split open. A brilliant light shone out from them, surrounding an angel whom the Lord had sent to him from heaven in order to instruct him in the teachings peculiar to the new sect. The angel gave to himself the name of the prophet "Mârâmûnî," and led him to the place of the book of "the Mormons," which the Lord had hidden in a mountain near the village of Manchester in the state of New York. He hit upon a stone box, resembling marble, which contained sheets bearing the teachings of the new religion on plates of gold, in the Hebrew and ancient Egyptian languages. He claimed that the Lord commanded him to tell nobody about them, to keep secret their calling him a prophet, and to return them to the Lord after reading them (while remembering the doctrines they contained). The young Joseph, who had left his studies after only four years of schooling, gathered a number of Jewish merchants who dwelt in his village and, after he had told them his story, they followed him. They proclaimed him a prophet for the "Mormons." They traveled about with him through several states, propagandizing for their sect, until his arrest by the American police on charges of horse theft and his killing in the jail.

The Mormons are considered among the most reactionary forces in the United States. Indeed, they formed an alliance two years ago with the Jews and the Catholics, and founded a special television station in the state of Virginia at a cost of about thirty million dollars for the purpose of opposing the rights of women, working for the defeat of liberal candidates for the U.S. Congress, and resisting the constitutional principle calling for the separation of church and state.
They are, furthermore, the wealthiest class after the Jews.

Among them is the owner of the international Marriott hotels.

The indications of creative license in this article are many, including (1) the presiding branch in Tel Aviv, (2) the Egyptian government’s rejection of a Mormon request to proselytize, (3) the New York jail, (4) the charge of “horse thievery,” (5) the address of the Friday meeting place, (6) the ethnic make-up of the congregation, (7) the language of the hymns, (8) the mode of dress of the worshipers, (9) the name of the professor, (10) the offer of help in emigration in exchange for converting, (11) salaries for missionaries, (12) the church’s emphasis on proselytizing in poor countries, (13) Israeli subsidies to the church, (14) the sin-forgiving character of the temple in Tel Aviv, (15) the existence of the temple in Tel Aviv, (16) the enthusiasm of the Israelis for their Latter-day Saint allies, (17) the name of the Book of Mormon, (18) the date of Moroni’s visit, (19) Moroni’s new name, (20) the Jewishness of Joseph’s early followers (does anybody detect a recurrent theme here?), (21) the circumstances surrounding the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, and (22) the Virginia television station and its political agenda. And so on and so forth. But the article has verisimilitude. It furnishes authentic, or at least seemingly authentic, details. One can even imagine that the authors of the piece may once have visited a Latter-day Saint service—although the incorrect street address lessens one’s confidence that this is so.

I like this article. I hope you liked it. I invite readers to send in the zaniest, the weirdest, the most paranoid, the most obviously off-the-wall anti-Mormon claims and arguments. Perhaps we will even select and publish some of the ones we find most entertaining. (A good selection of these is already available at Gary Novak’s important web site “Worst of the Anti-Mormon Web” [located at http://www.inficad.com/~novak/].) Some of us—not FARMS officially, I hasten to add—are considering the establish-

40 The “professor” seems to be a composite creation, based (very loosely) on at least three or four quite distinct people. This is, of course, an old and venerable literary technique.
ment of an award for “America’s Funniest Anti-Mormons,” although we certainly welcome international contributions, as well. (If there are enough submissions, perhaps we can open up a new category, like the annual “Foreign Film” Oscar at the Academy Awards.) We have settled on at least two prizes, to be known respectively as the “Korihor” and either the “Philastus” or the “Hurlbut.” The latter titles come from the name of one of the very earliest anti-Mormons, “Doctor Philastus Hurlbut” who, in an eerily prescient move that has since been emulated by several countercult luminaries, carried the name of “Doctor” without ever earning a degree.

Why would we go to such trouble? Simply because we hope to see better anti-Morman writing. We desire an anti-Mormon literature that will be yet more creative and entertaining than it has already been. This is a tall order, but, as the dawn of the new millennium draws nigh, who can doubt that the future is bright with promise?

Editor’s Picks

As in previous issues of the Review, I now list my recommendations among the items treated in the present number, accompanied by my own summary ratings of them. I have determined the rankings after reading the reviews published here and after consulting with the relevant reviewers. The final judgments, though, and the ultimate responsibility for them, are mine. This is a subjective undertaking. Here is how my rating system works:

**** Outstanding, a seminal work of the kind that appears only rarely.
*** Enthusiastically recommended.
** Warmly recommended.
* Recommended.

In this issue of the FARMS Review of Books, I can recommend the following:

** Keith Edward Tolbert and Eric Pement, The 1996 Directory of Cult and Research Organizations: A Worldwide Listing of 752 Agencies and Individuals. While certainly not for everybody, this is an invaluable
reference work for those interested in the countercult business in general and in the subculture of anti-Mormonism in particular.

* Thomas O. Moore, *A Detailed Chronology of the Book of Mormon*. Many students of the Book of Mormon will find this large chronological chart helpful in following the complex narrative of the book that the uneducated farmboy Joseph Smith supposedly tossed off in a couple of months.

* Keith C. Terry, *Into the Light: A Novel*. While its mixture of fact and fiction can be confusing, *Into the Light* does present some recent Book of Mormon research in a palatable and approachable way.

This number of the *FARMS Review of Books* was to have contained a trio of responses to a very important volume by Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson entitled *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997). Instead, it now appears that we will devote a special issue—a *Sonderausgabe*, as the Germans would call it—to this groundbreaking book. I hope that will appear relatively soon.

I wish to thank all those who have helped in the production of this issue of the *FARMS Review of Books*, especially the reviewers themselves. Shirley Ricks and Alison Coutts have been indispensable, as always, and Melvin J. Thorne has offered useful comments. Emily Johnson, Dan McKinlay, Robyn Patterson, Wendy Thompson, and James Whitaker have rendered able assistance.