"Properly Presented": The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt

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"Properly Presented": The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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by
Taunalyn Ford Rutherford
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Introduction

I am almost an intruder wherever I go. I am a stranger and the world knows me not. . . . O, God, let me retire from such a generation into dens, caves, deserts, mountains--anywhere . . . I feel for my family and pray for them continually. I hope they with me may have grace to endure to the end, and be saved in the kingdom of God. . . . I must acknowledge that I do anticipate with a great deal of pleasure the change of worlds. And, every day that I work on my history, I naturally think that the word "finis" will soon be added to the end. (409-10)

These words of Parley Parker Pratt appear near the end of his Autobiography. Originally they were part of a letter from Pratt to his family, written a little over four months before he was murdered. The letter was sent in care of Pratt's first son and namesake, who was to "read the enclosed letter to the family, and then have it carefully laid away as a part of [Pratt's] history" (408). Further on in the letter, Pratt writes, "My history is mostly completed. It will probably not be published in my day. Should anything happen to me, and the record be preserved, I wish it carefully compiled, copied, and taken care of" (409).
Considering the care Pratt took to insure that his autobiography would be published, he apparently did not wish to remain "a stranger" whom "the world [knew] not." But what of the autobiography of this man whose life spanned the fifty years from 1807 to 1857--a man who fathered thirty children and was brutally murdered by the legal husband of his twelfth and last plural wife? What of this book written by a man who "single-handedly invented Mormon book writing" (Crawley 13)--a pivotal figure in early Mormon history who wrote "more than fifty hymns and songs, and enough tracts and discourses to fill another volume" (Christmas 34), and who has been characterized as an intellectual second only to Joseph Smith (Pratt, "Review" 356)? What of the record of this frontiersman, who spent a year of his life in prison and "suffered just about every disease and physical hardship the frontier had to offer" (Christmas 34)--a preacher, missionary, and Apostle who crossed the country at least twenty times and traveled to Canada, England, and Chile, "for the gospel's sake" (Pratt, Autobiography 17)?

In 1874, the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt--compiled, edited, and published by his son Parley Jr. with the help of John Taylor--was introduced to Mormons, who quickly hailed him as a martyr, and to the world that "knew him not." More than a century later, scholars have done
little to come to know Parley P. Pratt through his autobiography. I feel that the Autobiography is worthy of consideration in American literature and American studies, and that those who read its pages will benefit by coming to know Pratt and his history.

The only critical work done on the Autobiography, thus far, is a 1966 Dialogue article by R. A. Christmas entitled, "The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt: Some Literary, Historical, and Critical Reflections." Christmas presents an effective formalist argument in dealing with the Autobiography. However, I feel more can and should be said about Pratt's autobiography in order to reveal its merit. Since 1966, when Christmas wrote his article, the field of American autobiography studies has grown substantially and developed new criteria with which to evaluate autobiography. My intent is to focus on Pratt's work under the specific heading of autobiography as opposed to the broader heading of literature. I feel this emphasis on genre places Pratt's autobiography in a more appropriate and favorable context, and reveals possibilities for using the Autobiography not only in literary studies but in American cultural studies.

Autobiography holds a unique position in the study of history and literature. In Wilhelm Dilthey's "human studies," "autobiography occupied
a central place as the key to understanding the curve of history, every sort of cultural manifestation, and the very shape and essence of human culture itself" (Olney 8). For Dilthey, there was no Zeitgeist, no single "meaning of life." For him the only meaning was that "which individuals perceived in, or attributed to their own lives." Thus, in Dilthey's words, "the autobiographer or the person who seeks the connecting threads in the history of his life is the primary historian, and the later historian seeking meanings as another age knew them should begin with autobiographers" (qtd. in The American Autobiography 13).

In America, autobiography is a particularly important genre. According to Thomas P. Doherty, "Autobiography is not a peculiarly American literary form, but it does seem to be a form peculiarly suited to the traditional American self-image: individualistic and optimistic" (qtd. in The American Autobiography 95). In fact, many scholars argue that to understand the American mind in all its complexity, one must read a variety of American autobiographies (Autobiography: Essays 14). And because many American autobiographies were composed by writers of fiction, drama, and poetry, "the student who sees autobiography as the central document possesses something very like a key to all the other literature as well" (Autobiography: Essays 14). Finally, according to
Robert F. Sayre, autobiographies are "literary-historical crossbreeds" that legitimate the student of American culture, who in the past has sought legitimacy "by getting literature and history to marry" (The American Autobiography 12).

In spite of the evidence for autobiography as an indicator of culture, there remains a dearth of Mormon studies, literary and historical, dealing with the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt. Likewise, this work is conspicuously missing from current studies on American autobiography, particularly those using autobiography to reveal American culture and to which I will refer in chapter two. I suggest that a study of the Autobiography, like the one I will include in chapter three, shows numerous examples of Pratt's "Americanness." I consider Pratt to be as valid a representative of American culture as Jonathan Edwards, Benjamin Franklin, or Henry David Thoreau, whose writings are fundamental works in the traditional canon of American autobiography.

According to Harold Bloom in his book, The American Religion, Mormonism is one of two branches of what he defines as the "American Religion." Bloom characterizes Mormonism as "American to the core" (81). If he is correct in his evaluation, and if we admit the value of autobiography in cultural studies, then Parley P. Pratt's personal narrative
could be valuable in studies of American autobiography and American studies in general. By introducing the *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* into the dialogue of these studies, and by comparing Pratt to other American autobiographers, Parley P. Pratt can be seen for what he was--a fascinating nineteenth-century frontier-American, a central figure in the early stages of Mormonism, and a captivating American autobiographer--and his valuable autobiography can become a tool for understanding American culture.

In John Taylor's introductory note to the *Autobiography*, entitled "To The Public," he writes that "as Bro. Parley brought the gospel to and baptized me, and as I have always entertained for him the most profound regard, I esteemed it a duty, due alike to gratitude and respect, to assist in having him properly presented before the community" (xvii). Likewise, the intent of my thesis is to "properly present" the *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* to scholars of American culture--specifically of American autobiography--who may have previously overlooked this piece of literature, for which I, too, entertain the most profound regard.

In order to "properly present" the *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, I have organized my argument into three chapters, each dealing with a different aspect of the work and its importance. In chapter one, "Properly
Placed: Parley P. Pratt and the Canon of American Autobiography,” I place Pratt’s autobiography within the current dialogue on American autobiography. In this chapter, I first review the past and present research in the field of American autobiography. I then suggest reasons why Pratt has been overlooked in past autobiography scholarship. And finally, I show why Pratt should be introduced into the canon and how the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt qualifies as a work of literature worthy of placement in the canon alongside Jonathan Edwards’ “Personal Narrative,” Franklin’s Autobiography, or Thoreau’s Walden.

In chapter two, “Properly Perceived: The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt and Criticism,” I focus on autobiography criticism which has dealt with American autobiographies that are similar to Pratt’s. I do this in order to show how Pratt’s writing should be understood. As mentioned above, Christmas’ reading of Pratt’s work was a formalist one that did not consider its unique genre--autobiography. I argue that a more effective way to “properly perceive” the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt is to read it in comparison with comparable works and in light of current critical theories of American autobiography. Thus in chapter two, I compare the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt first to Jonathan Edwards’ “Personal Narrative,” then to Franklin’s Autobiography, and finally to Thoreau's
Walden. In these comparisons I draw from the critical work of important scholars in the field in order to demonstrate how the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt relates to current research, to show its value in the dialogue, and foster greater understanding and appreciation of the Autobiography.

In chapter three, "Properly Portrayed: The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt as a Mirror of Culture," I exhibit how Pratt portrays himself in a way that might qualify him as a quintessential nineteenth-century frontier-American. I provide examples from the Autobiography which display characteristics and values of nineteenth-century, frontier America. I also draw on the argument of Bloom in showing how Pratt's autobiography reflects the culture of what he called the American Religion. My argument is that Parley P. Pratt's life, as portrayed in his personal narrative, reflects the culture of his time—not only frontier-American culture, but also the culture of Mormonism which qualifies to be identified as uniquely American. Pratt's autobiography, as a mirror of these cultures makes it important to American studies. In conclusion, I recommend that the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt be "properly prioritized" in the canon of American autobiography as a tool for teaching American culture.
I. Properly Placed: Parley P. Pratt and the Canon of American Autobiography

"It would be hard to point to a field of contemporary literary studies more vibrant than autobiography studies. Where else does one find a wealth of primary material still mostly unread and unranked?" So questions Margo Culley in the introduction to her book, *American Women's Autobiography* (3). One piece of primary material "mostly unread and unranked" is the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt. In this chapter I will consider why Pratt's work has been overlooked and assert its worthiness for inclusion in the canon of American autobiography. Before doing so, I will examine what has been done and what is currently being done in the field of autobiography studies in order to place Pratt's autobiography in context.

According to Culley, "autobiography theory today is an international playground where strenuous mental gymnastics keep all at the top of their form." Current critics of autobiography deal with a number of important issues such as genre, gender, subjectivity, authority, the construction of the self within language systems, theories of time, narrative, and memory, and the problems of creating meaning and history (Culley 3).
The following overview of literature shows how Margo Culley is correct in her perception of autobiography studies.

**Overview of American Autobiography Studies**

Scholarship and criticism in the realm of American autobiography began in the 1960s with the landmark *Bibliography of American Autobiographies* (1961) by Louis Kaplan. This work inspired two book-length studies: Robert F. Sayre's *The Examined Self: Benjamin Franklin*, *Henry Adams, Henry James* (1964) and Daniel B. Shea's *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America* (1968). Sayre was among the first to note "a special relationship between the emergence of recognizing autobiography as a distinct genre and the establishment of the United States as a political entity" (Payne 12).

Other scholars such as James M. Cox expand on the idea that there is a relationship between America and autobiography. In his book, *Recovering Literature's Lost Ground: Essays in American Autobiography*, Cox points out that the term *autobiography* made its appearance "just after the age of revolution, when the modern self was being liberated as well as defined" (14), and "that an astonishingly large proportion of the slender shelf of so-called American classics is occupied by
autobiographies” (12). Such observations suggest the relevance of autobiography to American studies.

Shea's work, *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America*, deals with Puritan and Quaker autobiography and is of great importance to the study of American autobiography. Later research on spiritual autobiography, such as that done by Blasing and Couser, to which I will next refer, relies heavily on Shea's work. Unlike Sayre, Shea tries to avoid overarching generalizations. This work has significance for Pratt's work because of the possible influence of Quaker or Puritan personal narratives on his style and ideology, and in my comparison of Pratt to Jonathan Edwards in chapter two.

In the 1970s "our understanding of American life-writing as a distinct category of study was enlarged" by further critical works (Payne xii). Two of the most important include, Mutlu Konuk Blasing's *The Art of Life: Studies in American Autobiographical Literature* (1977), and G. Thomas Couser's *American Autobiography: The Prophetic Mode* (1979).

Blasing's *The Art of Life* is an eclectic study of American autobiography. She addresses a wide range of approaches to personal narratives and includes a variety of cultures in her selection of autobiographies. Many of Blasing's questions, like those dealing with
genre definitions, the boundary between truth and fiction, and the question of influences in American autobiography, were explored further in the 1980s. Blasing's definition of autobiography is very broad, and I adopt it in my own research because it is more inclusive. According to Blasing, autobiography is a work "in which the hero, narrator, and author can be identified by the same name" (xi). Thus, she is able to incorporate Whitman's "Song of Myself" and Thoreau's *Walden* into her argument.

Blasing argues that "the recording of a life necessarily represents the fictionalization--to greater or lesser degree--of the life lived" (xi). Finally, she makes the important observation that the "similarities between post-colonial American personal narratives . . . that point to the Puritan heritage may derive, to some extent, not so much from 'descent' or direct influence but from production under similar social circumstances" (xiii). I will also apply Blasing's ideas to the *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* in chapter two of my thesis.

Couser traces a "coherent tradition--perhaps the mainstream of American autobiography from the Puritans to the present" in the personal narratives of Thomas Shepard, Increase Mather, Jonathan Edwards, John Woolman, Benjamin Franklin, and proceeding through such nineteenth-century authors as Thoreau. He argues that these writers tend "to assume
the role of prophet in writing autobiography.” Couser’s definition of a prophetic autobiographer, simply stated, is one that sets himself up as an exemplary figure, baring an important message. Couser suggests that the “tradition of prophetic autobiography has its roots in Puritan literature.” Additionally, he states that “the source for the distinctive concerns and literary strategies of the prophetic autobiographers can be located in their Puritan attitudes toward themselves and their history” (qtd. in Payne xii). Couser’s book is important in our discussion of the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt because Pratt’s autobiography fits beautifully into almost every aspect of Couser’s argument. Pratt clearly follows the pattern of prophetic autobiography, as I will demonstrate in chapter two.

A flowering of research dealing with autobiographies from more diverse American cultures occurred in the 1980s when two notable essay collections were published. The first collection is, The American Autobiography: A Collection of Critical Essays (1981), edited by Albert E. Stone. These essays take a cultural rather than a narrowly literary approach to autobiography, based on the premise that autobiography is best understood as a content, not a form. The second collection, First Person Singular: Studies in American Autobiography (1988), edited by A.
Robert Lee, includes essays on Native American, Asian-American, and Jewish-American autobiography, to name a few of the diverse cultures addressed. Naturally, any study that attempts to introduce a new culture into the canon of American autobiography has implications for my attempt to add Pratt's voice.

Scholars of American autobiography in the 1980s also followed poststructuralist trends in criticism and theory. Their arguments have various relationships to Pratt's autobiography and will be considered in chapter two. One example is *Altered Egos: Authority in American Autobiography* (1989) by G. Thomas Couser. Couser argues that "autobiography may be regarded not so much as produced by a pre-existent self but as producing a provisional and contingent one" (18-19). Couser's main emphasis is on authority in autobiography, which he says,

never resides exclusively in the text or the self, or even in the correspondence between them; rather it is something negotiated and renegotiated, between the autobiographer and others--collaborators, editors, critics, biographers, historians, and lay readers. (253)

explores how the autobiographer, "by retelling his life to himself, comes to know himself in and through the act of revision" (16). Along the same lines, Paul John Eakin's *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self Invention* (1985) concludes that autobiographical truth is not fixed, but an evolving content in a process of self-discovery.

James M. Cox produced an important collection of critical essays in the 1980s entitled, *Recovering Literature's Lost Ground* (1989). Of particular note for my study is his essay on The Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson in which Cox suggests that Jefferson's work has been overlooked in autobiography studies and details why it should be given greater consideration. His argument has interesting implications for the *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*, as I will demonstrate later in this chapter.

In 1988, James Craig Holte wrote *The Ethnic I: A Sourcebook for Ethnic-American Autobiography*, in which he argues that autobiography is one way of imposing order on change. Many Americans have experienced the change of moving from a foreign country to establish permanent roots in America. Therefore, Holte says that one reason for the popularity of autobiography in the United States could be the feeling Americans often
have of being uprooted and their trying to combat this by imposing order through a personal narrative.

Another interesting study in the 1980s was Arnold Krupat’s “American Autobiography: The Western Tradition.” This article presents a case for more emphasis on the western-American autobiographical tradition, including people like Daniel Boone and Mark Twain, as opposed to the more traditional eastern-American autobiography. Krupat emphasizes the impact of the Native American on the western-American tradition in contrast to Europe’s influence on eastern-American autobiography. Krupat’s study has one major implication for Parley P. Pratt’s autobiography, namely that Pratt, as a frontier-American, should be considered as such and not required to conform to the same criteria used for criticizing northeastern American writers.

A very helpful work in the criticism of American autobiography is Herbert Leibowitz’s, Fabricating Lives: Explorations in America Autobiography (1989). Leibowitz begins his study with the Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin and concludes with Edward Dalberg’s Autobiography. His important considerations on style as “the crucial interpretive evidence about any autobiography” (xxiv) will figure into my own stylistic criticism of the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt.
Finally, scholarship in the early 1990s has become even more multicultural, creating a more diverse canon of American autobiography, and has focused on new methods of criticism. Paul John Eakin attempts to give historical perspective on American autobiography in his *American Autobiography: Retrospect and Prospect* (1991), and presents new voices and new varieties of American personal narratives. James Robert Payne follows Eakin in his *Multicultural Autobiography: American Lives* (1992). Like Eakin, Payne deals with a wide range of American autobiographies such as those by women, Native Americans, and immigrants—he even discusses Pan-American autobiography.

Eakin added another work to the field in 1992, entitled *Touching the World: Reference in Autobiography*. Here he focuses on language in autobiography and how it reveals culture. Addressing the topic of subjectivity, he again asserts that autobiography represents the evolution of a person. The most recent book-length work dealing with multicultural autobiography is by Ronald A. T. Judy, *(Dis) Forming the American Canon: African-Arabic Slave Narratives and the Vernacular* (1993). Judy's book continues the pattern of adding important American voices to the canon that have hitherto been overlooked, as I will do with Pratt's voice.
Another very recent book in the field is Religious Autobiographies (1995) by Gary L. Comstock. Although this study focuses on the autobiographies of individuals who subscribe to various world religions--not just American--it is a watershed work because of its approach. Comstock uses this text for his introductory world-religion courses, arguing that the first-person narrative is the best and most interesting source for understanding a religion. Such a text, specifically for teaching American religion, remains to be written. Rather than using a traditional textbook, a teacher could find a collection of American religious autobiographies (including Mormon autobiographies) profitable for religious history classes. I note his work here because I think it has interesting implications for Pratt’s autobiography as a representation of Mormonism, and American religion in general.

I have included above a few of the most important works of the 1990s and those that apply most aptly to the topic of Parley P. Pratt’s autobiography. At this time of prolific research in the field, bringing another voice into the canon—that of Parley P. Pratt—is an appropriate gesture.
The Canon of American Autobiography

A current list of the canonical works of American autobiography would probably not include the title *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*. Before I explicate the reasons why Pratt's work is missing I will attempt to list those works that are generally considered canonical. The most commonly anthologized works of the eighteenth century, according to my findings, are Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* and Jonathan Edwards' "Personal Narrative." For the early twentieth century the major works are those written by Henry Adams, Henry James, and Mark Twain. But the nineteenth century, Pratt's century, is problematic. Paul John Eakin states, "It is not self-evident what texts would be included in a course on nineteenth-century American autobiography. . . . Even the best-known candidates--*Walden* (1854) and "Song of Myself" (1855)--are not always recognized as autobiographies" (*American Autobiography* 3). Scholars have dealt with other nineteenth-century autobiographies, like those of Frederick Douglass, Richard Henry Dana, and Francis Parkman, and are beginning to take a multicultural emphasis; however, the works of Thoreau and Whitman are still frequently selected in nineteenth-century autobiography criticism, in spite of their reputation as "nonstandard."
Reasons for Pratt’s Exclusion

I suggest five possible reasons why Parley P. Pratt’s autobiography has been excluded from the canon of American autobiography:

The first obvious reason is that, as Eakin stated, the nineteenth-century canon of autobiography is not “self-evident.” The canon is still being defined and will continue to be redefined. Pratt’s autobiography is perhaps representative of yet another subculture within a multitude of cultures that still need to be mainstreamed into the autobiographical canon. Perhaps it is only a matter of time before Pratt and his *Autobiography* are more commonly considered.

I consider Pratt’s religion as the second reason for exclusion. Mormonism, states Bloom, “began as a scandalous heresy and now is an eminently respectable established church” (53); however, it is usually not classed as a mainstream American religion, and is often overlooked, even rejected, in much American scholarship. “Mormons and Mormonism have had from the beginning a bad press, both at the popular and at the more sophisticated or academic levels,” says Eugene England (63).

However, this dismissal of Mormonism as an insignificant minority religion is becoming more and more difficult for scholars. Harold Bloom’s *The American Religion* presents Mormonism as a growing factor that must
be dealt with. Aside from characterizing Mormonism as the “American Religion,” Bloom argues that the size, wealth, and influence of the Church are becoming so great, that American scholars simply must familiarize themselves with Mormonism. He also warns that the religion must not be minimalized, saying:

What would the Mormons wish to do if the United States ever has so large a Mormon population, and so wealthy a consolidation of Mormon economic power, that governing our democracy became impossible without Mormon cooperation? What seems like science fiction now will not seem so in 2020, if the Mormons are then one American out of eight. (90)

Bloom explains that he is not alarmed at the growing power of Mormonism, but simply argues for closer consideration of this “American Religion.” Bloom’s argument makes Mormonism seem like less of a fringe movement.

Martin A. Marty suggests that Pratt’s Mormon religion is actually more mainstream American than it first appears. Pratt’s turning from established Baptist boundaries to seek the primitive gospel was not uncommon in the American experience of his time. Thus, rejecting the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt on the basis of its being a minority experience is inadmissible.
Actually, Pratt's life exemplifies what many Americans of his time were doing. Marty explains that,

In the nineteenth century [the bounds of inherited religious institutions] no longer could contain the religious impulses of all citizens or new immigrants. The American landscape offered so many remote places in which to try new ventures. The new century presented challenges that visionaries thought the old forms could not meet. . . . They ignored or despised the existing churches. . . . They had in common a sense that they were pathfinders beyond the bounds of existing pilgrimages.

(189)

Examples of these pathfinders can be found in Robert Owen, Alexander Campbell, the Shakers, and groups like those at Brook Farm, Fruitlands, and the Oneida community. Marty speaks of Pratt as central to Mormonism and classes the Mormons as "the best-known of the innovators," saying that "they led the most ambitious communal trek in American history" (198). These arguments may indicate that, Pratt, his religion, and his autobiography are important to cultural studies and would be appropriately included in the canon of American autobiography.
A third reason for Pratt's exclusion from the canon could be his social class. According to Marvin Hill, "many, if not most, early Mormons were men and women of modest means and little formal education." Hill includes Parley P. Pratt in a list of "poor farmers or artisans barely finding the funds to meet their needs in 1830" (16). Pratt never pulled himself out of poverty to become famous on the national level. In contrast, those whose works have been included in the canon were usually wealthy, well educated, or well-known as a national figure. The average American reader is perhaps more interested in the autobiography of an "important" person than of a poor farmer.

A fourth possible reason for the Autobiography's neglect is that Mormon scholars of the past have been absent from the dialogue of American autobiography studies. Thus, Pratt's obscurity remains, in part, a factor of his not being "properly presented" to the scholars in the field. Mormons could clearly be doing more to reveal works like the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt to the scholarly community. Additionally, studies of this sort are especially suited to the Mormon scholar because Mormons are encouraged to write their personal history. Thus, many Mormons are familiar with the process of writing a personal narrative which adds greater insight to reading autobiography and there
are many autobiographies to consider in addition to Pratt's in Mormon literature.

Fifth and finally, a major factor in the oversight is that scholars have not read Pratt's autobiography using the most effective criteria. Pratt's writing could easily be rejected from a strictly literary canon because it does not read like great literature on a par with the writings of say Fielding, Thoreau, or Melville, to whom Pratt was compared by R. A. Christmas. And, as Christmas points out, Pratt's writing is often prolix, repetitive, and trite (36). However, Pratt's autobiography does have a certain eloquence. One is still moved by the language of the following passage, which Pratt wrote while on a ship sailing from his home to serve yet another of his many missions for his church:

Just imagine sundown, twilight, the shades of evening, the curtains of the solitary night gathering in silent gloom and lone melancholy around a father who loves his home and its inmates; his fireside and the family altar! Behold him standing leaning over the vessel's side as it slides over the waters of the lone and boundless Pacific, gazing for hours in succession into the bosom of its dark abyss, or watching its white foam and sparkling spray! What are his thoughts? Can you divine
them? Behold, he prays! For what does he pray? For every wife, for every child, for every near and dear friend he has on earth, he prays most earnestly! most fervently! He calls each by name over and over again, before the altar of remembrance. And when this is done for all on earth, he remembers those in Heaven; calls their names; communes with them in spirit; wonders how they are doing; whether they think of him. He calls to mind their acts and suffering in life, their death, and the grave where sleeps their precious dust. (389)

By the same token, I agree with Eugene England when he questions the adequacy of formalist criteria "to account for the experiences of [his] students--and [himself]--with certain literature, especially some which powerfully affected [them] despite its obvious lack of formal or aesthetic perfection" (61).

A solution for freeing the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt from the bonds of formalist criticism is, as I have stated, to consider it under the specific category of autobiography, rather than under the general category of literature. Looking at this work as autobiography, instead of literature per se, enables one to escape, to an extent, rigid formalist criteria that concerns some scholars. Albert E. Stone, for example, expressed his
uneasiness "over the tendency to treat autobiography chiefly as a branch of imaginative literature and thus to stress artistic creation over the equally complex processes of historical recreation, ideological argument and psychological expression." According to Stone "Life is the more inclusive sign--not Literature--which deserves to be placed above the gateway to the house of autobiography" (19).

Paul John Eakin stresses that "as long as we subscribe to literature as the sign of autobiography, assuming a traditional aesthetic construction of this governing term, most of the works [of American autobiography] are likely to go unread." Eakin also makes the important observation that the "emphasis on autobiography as an imaginative art has led to the neglect of the autobiography of even so archetypically American a figure as Thomas Jefferson" (6). Eakin adds his hope "that the present interest in autobiography is in part a hungering for a literature of content" (125). He then proceeds to reveal the "content literature" of The Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson

Jefferson and Pratt

Interesting parallels exist between The Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson and the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt. For example, both works fall under Eakin's category of a "literature of content"; Pratt's
personal narrative, like Jefferson’s, is packed with content and yet, also
like Jefferson’s, has been neglected because of its lack of literary merit.

Both men also de-emphasize personal matters; in fact, they
sometimes ignore them altogether. For example:

[Jefferson] offers all but nothing about his parents. . . . Nothing
at all about his brother and six sisters. . . . And only the barest
mention of his marriage to the widow Martha Skelton, daughter
of John Wayles, which doubles Jefferson’s property; later on,
there is the fact of her death, which ended ten years of what
he calls “unchecquered happiness.” As if this were not lack
enough, there is hardly a word in the book about Monticello, the

Likewise Pratt’s narrative is often barren of personal details. His
first wife, Thankful, died from complications of childbirth in 1837. Pratt
does devote a few pages to her memory, but gives little of his inner
feelings at his loss. In the same chapter, six short weeks after Thankful’s
death, he reports almost incidentally that he has remarried. These are the
only two of his twelve marriages that Pratt officially mentions. Thus, the
reader of the Autobiography is left alone to fill in the blanks concerning
Pratt’s last ten wives, whose fascinating stories and interactions as
sister wives make for a book in their own right. As further evidence of
his impersonal narrative style, Pratt rushes through the year 1840, which
includes his mission to England, in one paragraph. And he gives only
sketchy details of his journey west with the pioneer company of August,
1847, and of his near apostasy in Kirtland.

But the Jefferson and Pratt autobiographies are not entirely devoid
of emotion. Yet both men use personal feeling and detail for a distinct
purpose. These writings, in the main, are clear examples of
"autobiography as memoir, which means that [they] will relate
[themselves] to the external world of the author in history, not to the
addresses those who will look at him as the author of the Declaration of
Independence. Pratt writes for those who will see him as an Apostle and
major figure in the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jefferson's authorship of the Declaration of Independence was the
key event of his life, and although he eliminated personal feelings and
relationships from his autobiography, he does not neglect to include the
original draft of the Declaration, before it was altered, thus "affirming
and maintaining his original authorship of the Declaration"
(Autobiography: Essays 130). James M. Cox says of Jefferson's work:
Much as we might want to look between the lines for Jefferson's concealed personality, it is of first importance to see that Jefferson sees his life in this book as what he had written for his country and the world. He had after all, practically written the world for his countrymen to live in.

(Autobiography: Essays 130)

Parley P. Pratt had a similar focus in writing his autobiography, which emphasizes his role in the establishment of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and his position as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. Like Jefferson, he "all but dispenses with his early life in a swift movement toward the key [decision] of his life" (Autobiography: Essays 130), his decision to sacrifice his mortal life in pursuit of eternal life. Pratt condenses his parentage, childhood, youth, and young manhood into one four-page chapter. The scant personal information Pratt gives in this short chapter is carefully chosen to foreshadow his eventual importance in the Church as an Apostle, which honor came to him because of his decision to sacrifice his life to the Lord.

For example, Pratt includes this story about one of his few experiences in formal schooling as background to his later prominence:
In this school, by close application, I made such extraordinary progress that the teacher often spoke of me to the whole school, and exhorted them to learn as Parley Pratt did;—said he (to some of them who were more fond of mischief than of study), if you would learn as he does, you would become men of wisdom and talent in the world; but if you continue the course you have done you will remain in obscurity and unknown; while he will be known, and fill important stations in society. (3)

After twelve short pages, the narrative turns to an account of Pratt's major decision to sacrifice all he has to serve the Lord and his subsequent, miraculous conversion to Mormonism through reading the Book of Mormon. But following this more subjective glimpse, Pratt's "personal narrative" becomes for the most part a detailed history of the Church until his death, emphasizing either Pratt's role in each event or his reaction to it. This recording of events explains why the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt is such a frequently quoted source in Mormon history. In fact, Parley P. Pratt, Jr. stated in his editor's preface that "[Pratt's] history . . . was so interwoven with that of the Church, that many of the most interesting sketches of Church history will be found therein" (xv).
But Pratt's history was intentionally "interwoven with that of the Church," unfortunately at the expense of personal details. Reva Stanley, biographer of Parley P. Pratt, said of the Autobiography that "while telling a vitally interesting story, [it] is not adequate. It does not give a picture of the man behind the tale; the human being of sentimental emotions does not emerge, and we are left wondering what [Pratt] really was like" (8-9). As Cox so aptly states, I could, like Stanley, try to "look between the lines" for what Pratt concealed in his personal life, and why; however, what Parley P. Pratt wanted the world to know was his life as a prominent member of the Church for which he was willing to give his life, and did.

Cox's reading of The Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson makes the Autobiography seem more valuable because he emphasizes, as Stone suggests, "the complex processes of historical recreation, ideological argument and psychological expression" (19), rather than making artistic creation the sole criteria for judgment. This emphasis which Cox uses in reading Jefferson's autobiography is important to my argument because Pratt's autobiography requires the same emphasis on historical recreation, ideological argument, and psychological expression, in order to reveal its merit. As demonstrated, the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt
lends itself to comparison with the Autobiography of Thomas Jefferson and to Cox’s critical reading of it. I believe that Pratt’s work can and should be added to the canon just as Cox has attempted to add Thomas Jefferson’s. It is “literature of content” and is full of critical possibilities when viewed not simply as literature but as life, written with distinct intent.

One major question remains regarding the suitability of including Pratt’s work in the canon: Can his autobiography stand up to those in the traditional canon? If we place life above the gateway to the house of autobiography and fully investigate the Autobiography, I believe the answer is yes: because the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt is life. Despite imperfections in the literary style, Pratt’s autobiography could be as valuable to students of American autobiography as are the three major works in the present canon of American autobiography with which I will deal: Jonathan Edwards’ “Personal Narrative,” Franklin’s Autobiography, and Thoreau’s Walden. To appreciate why Pratt belongs with other important American autobiographers, our perception of his work must be in line with modern autobiography criticism. This is the focus of my second chapter.
In the present chapter I have begun to assert the worthiness of the *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* for inclusion in the canon of American autobiography. I have shown that Pratt's work can be "properly placed" among the other major works of the canon by considering it as "life" rather than solely "literature," as suggested by Stone's theory. Eakin has set a precedent in his work with Thomas Jefferson, showing how to apply Stone's ideas in order to reassess the value of autobiography. Eakin has revealed the "life" in Jefferson's autobiography, and I have applied Eakin's arguments to Pratt in order to reveal the worth of his autobiography. Pratt's autobiography has most likely remained on the shelf in many libraries; I argue that it should be "properly placed" in the hands of scholars and in the canon of American autobiography.
II. Properly Perceived: The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt and Criticism

According to Alfred Kazin, "personal history is directly an effort to find salvation, to make one's own history come out right" (The American 35). My comparison of Edwards' Personal Narrative, Franklin's Autobiography, and Thoreau's Walden, with the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, will focus on the same theme--salvation--although each author sought for a different kind of salvation.

First, Edwards was seeking an exclusive, God-given salvation, independent of his works, which I will refer to as salvation through grace. Franklin sought salvation that was self-obtained and independent of God. In his Autobiography, he stressed his inventions, his contributions to his country, and his personal success. Desiring to be immortalized through his autobiography, Franklin left a formula for what I call public salvation. Thoreau "attempted to live life as myth" and raise life to the level of an art (Couser, American 64-65). Like Franklin, Thoreau believed man could "elevate his life through conscious endeavor" (61). Unlike Franklin, however, Thoreau rejected endeavors for public success for the fulfillment he discovered in nature. Thoreau wanted to return to some
spiritual aspects of Puritanism, but rejected the dogma of the Christian world in favor of an inward sense of truth. Although he drew from the two previous schools of autobiography--ideological and practical--Thoreau ultimately wished to transcend them. In his journal, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "There are two directions in which souls move: one is trust, religion . . . entranced waiting, the worship of Ideas: the other is activity, the busybody, the following of that practical talent which we have. . . . We have no one example of the [unified] poetic life realized." (Emerson 80). Thoreau tried to accomplish what Emerson said no one had yet done. In moving to Walden pond--the practical activity--and then writing about his experiment--the focus on ideas--Thoreau was aiming for the "unified poetic life." The transcendent salvation which Thoreau sought for in writing *Walden*, I call poetic salvation.

Finally, Pratt also sought salvation in his writings. The comparison between his autobiography and those of Edwards, Franklin, and Thoreau becomes more fruitful when we focus on this theme of salvation because Pratt wrote to make his life come out right in each of the above mentioned areas. He draws on aspects of each type of salvation: spiritual salvation involving grace; public salvation, through all his achievements; and the poetic life, in producing his autobiography. However, Pratt sought for his
own brand of salvation which I call eternal. Pratt's eternal salvation consists of the sacrifice of his temporal life--including worldly possessions, worldly fame, and his own selfish desires--for his eternal reward in the next. This I consider the theme of the Autobiography-- "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it" (Mark 8: 35).

As I draw on the critical theories and ideas of various authors who have analyzed Edwards' Personal Narrative, Franklin's Autobiography, and Thoreau's Walden, I will continually refer back to the theme of salvation as one unifying device. I have sought mainly for theories that help illuminate each author's search for salvation and how it relates to Pratt's quest for salvation in the same area.

As important as the personal quest is in each autobiography, Edwards, Franklin, Thoreau, and Pratt were not only concerned about their own salvation as they wrote; they also had the salvation of their readers in mind. One critic, Thomas Couser, used Edwards' "Personal Narrative," Franklin's Autobiography, and Thoreau's Walden, among other works, to reveal a tradition in American letters that he called prophetic autobiography--a form inspired by the desire to enlighten or "save" those who will pass through experiences similar to those of the author.
According to Couser, the prophetic autobiographer "functions as a representative of his community--as a reformer of its ethos, articulator of its highest ideals, interpreter of its history, and activist in the service of its best interest" (American 4). The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt lends itself to Couser's criticism because Pratt too was just such a prophetic representative of his community. Therefore, as a second unifying devise, I will situate Pratt in Couser's framework and show how he is a prophetic autobiographer on a par with Edwards, Franklin, and Thoreau respectively.

To summarize: this chapter will help reveal how Pratt wrote his autobiography in order to achieve eternal salvation. It will also emphasize how Pratt wrote his autobiography prophetically, in order to influence the salvation of those who would read it. My comparison of Pratt with the other three authors will help bring these objectives into focus. I will proceed chronologically in my comparisons, first with Pratt's work to Jonathan Edwards' "Personal Narrative," next to Franklin's Autobiography, and finally, to Thoreau's Walden. Each section will begin with the author's quest for personal salvation--incorporating pertinent critical literature which illuminates this--and conclude with their roles as prophetic autobiographers. Throughout, I will demonstrate how
comparable the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt is to other great works of American autobiography and how equally worthy it is of our attention. These comparisons will also reveal how applicable current critical theories are to the Autobiography and will foster greater understanding and a clearer perception of Pratt's work.

**The Personal Narratives of Edwards and Pratt**

Both the "Personal Narrative" of Jonathan Edwards and the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt contain conversion stories, and in this way center on the quest for spiritual salvation. There are similarities and differences in the way each man dealt with this salvation. First, I will consider the characteristics of Edwards' quest for salvation, using various critical arguments, and then draw comparisons to Pratt.

Edwards, as a Puritan, came from a long tradition of autobiographical writing. "American autobiography is precisely coeval with Puritan colonization because New England churches required candidates for membership to recite their spiritual histories before the congregations they hoped to join" (Culley 32). Further, Elizabeth Kaspar Aldrich says that "central to Puritan theology and culture was what we may call the life accounted for: consciously and conscientiously, the life
examined, interpreted, justified, and shaped into a transmissible account” (First Person 18).

Edwards’s “Personal Narrative” is similar to other Puritan autobiographies in that it is “primarily concerned with the question of grace” (Shea xi). The intent of the spiritual autobiographer in early America, according to Shea, was to show that they had “been accepted into divine life, an acceptance signified by psychological and moral changes which the autobiographer comes to discern in his past experience” (xi). Shea says that although it is the most well known Puritan autobiography, Edward’s “Personal Narrative” is not the most typical. The “Personal Narrative” differs in that it focuses more on the process of conversion rather than on the signs that have taken place because of conversion (Shea 182-83).

When writing his autobiography, Pratt could possibly have even been influenced by Puritan autobiographical tradition, or perhaps he was just responding “to essentially similar social, spiritual, and literary experiences” (Blasing xii). By the time Pratt began to write his autobiography in 1854, there was not only a Puritan tradition of autobiography but also a less well developed Mormon tradition of recording personal histories.
Pratt was most likely following the Prophet Joseph Smith's 1838 account of his "first vision" in the composition of his autobiography, which in turn follows the lead suggested by the introductory passages of the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith, Nephi (the first writer in the Book of Mormon), and Pratt, all give birth date and place, followed by a short history of the family into which they were born, including details about their fathers, followed by descriptions of early yearnings for truth not found in religions of the day and then the miraculous story of conversion. Pratt did much to expand and strengthen the tradition of Mormon personal history which Smith essentially began. Like Edwards' Narrative which is the most widely read Puritan autobiography, the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, next to Joseph Smith's account of his first vision, is one of the most published and read autobiographies in the Church.

David L. Minter created a critical theory that deals with how authors work out their salvation or their intent in autobiography. His study includes Edwards's Personal Narrative with three other American autobiographies--Franklin's, Thoreau's, and Henry Adams'--which follow what he calls "the interpreted design" (18). This design or strategy consists of juxtaposing a man of bold design who acts and a man of
interpretation through whose consciousness the story of the other is told (Minter 18-19).

This “interpreted design” is easily identified in Edwards’ “Personal Narrative.” Edwards sets up the two obviously failed seasons where he acts in ignorance against the season of grace when as the enlightened man who is interpreting the actions, he finally teaches us what it is like to truly be saved.

Pratt too acted as an interpretive man through whose voice the bold man of design is portrayed. His interpretation of his actions throughout his autobiography is very positive and forgiving, turning his mistakes into positive learning experiences, as I will address later in connection with Franklin. Pratt interprets most events and actions as a part of a grand design of God and as good. And he turns his mistakes into positive learning experiences as the man of interpretation. Pratt’s interpretive man always makes the man of action look as good as possible.

Edwards and Pratt both delve into spiritual matters at a young age. Edwards wrote, “I used to pray five times a day in secret, and to spend much time in religious talk with other boys and used to meet with them to pray together” (121). Similarly, at the age of seven, Pratt first learned to read from the scriptures. Pratt wrote that after reading of Jesus and his
Apostles, he “longed to fall at the feet of Jesus; to worship him, or to offer my life for his” (121). He wrote that “at about twelve years of age [he] felt a longing desire and an inexpressible anxiety to secure to himself a part in [the first resurrection]” (121). Edwards considers his youthful “affections” and “delight” in religion counterfeit and something that one should be careful not to mistake for grace. Pratt, on the other hand, portrays his early experiences with religion as positive, real, preparatory, and indicative of the spiritual leader he would become. Thus both use their early experiences to build up to their salvation, although in different ways: negative versus positive.

Both experience and write of serious illnesses that tried their faith. Edwards suffered a “pleurisy,” or a respiratory disorder, and Pratt was subjected to many frontier illnesses. Edwards attributed the illness to God’s displeasure with his life. Pratt, however, never attributed his illnesses to the wrath of God, although he did, at times, interpret other people’s illnesses this way. Pratt, in contrast to Edwards, writes of miraculous healings each time he is stricken with disease, healings that are intended to attest to the power of God working through a restored priesthood.
Edwards' central focus is on how he came to receive grace. In order to show his complete dependence on the grace of God, he described how he "had a variety of concerns and exercises about [his] soul from [his] childhood, but had two more remarkable seasons of awakening before [he] met with that change by which [he] was brought to those new dispositions and that new sense of things that [he has] since had" (121). As Minter states, "from the outset it is clear that only the final, true awakening has made Edwards' life significant" (74).

Edwards' first "season" was during his childhood and in connection with other young boys in his father's congregation during a "time of remarkable awakening," and was characterized by "self-righteous pleasure" (121). The second "season" came after a severe illness where he says God "shook me over the pit of hell" (122), and was characterized by his own calculated efforts to gain salvation, though still without the grace of God. During this time he "felt a spirit to part with all things in the world for an interest in Christ" (122). He then says it was difficult for him to accept the doctrine of God's grace, or as he states, "the doctrine of God's sovereignty, in choosing whom He would to eternal life and rejecting whom He pleased" (122). It is not until Edwards sensed his "exceeding dependence on God's grace" that he achieved salvation, at
which time he says he felt "an abhorrence of [his] own righteousness" (131).

The center of Pratt's narrative, like Edwards', is salvation through grace. However, according to Mormon theology, "it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do" (2 Nephi 25:23), and herein lies the difference between the two narratives and their final message. In Pratt's autobiography the "all we can do" constitutes his complete sacrifice of his life for the gospel. Thus, the theme of the Autobiography is actually grace after all we can do, or in other words, salvation after the complete sacrifice of one's life. In Lectures on Faith, a work attributed to Joseph Smith, it states that, "a religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation" (69). This doctrine obviously influenced Pratt when he formed his narrative because, whether consciously or not, he centers his autobiography around the theme of sacrifice, which allows him to earn his salvation.

Toward the beginning of Pratt's autobiography, the story builds to the point when he has made a nice home for himself and his wife. Pratt is then on the frontier in Ohio where the reader may assume he will be satisfied. However, he includes a detailed conversation with his long-lost
brother, William, to conclude his exposition and lead us into the conflict of the story.

After William admires the lifestyle that Parley had established (16), Parley tells him that he can "no longer be contented to dwell in quiet and retirement on [his] farm, while [he] had light to impart to mankind" (16), and is thus leaving it all to preach the gospel. William of course protests, questioning how he could leave all his possessions and, more importantly, how he could provide for his family. Parley replies, "I have bank bills enough, on the very best institutions in the world, to sustain myself and family while we live. . . . They are true bills and founded on capital that will never fail, though heaven and earth should pass away" (17). Then Parley reveals the theme of his autobiography as he continues:

I then unlocked my treasury and drew from thence a large pocket book, full of promissory notes like the following:

'whoever shall forsake father or mother, brethren or sisters, houses or lands, wife or children, for my sake and the gospel's, shall receive an hundred fold in this life, and in the world to come life everlasting.' 'If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will in my name and I will give it you.' 'All things are possible to him that believeth.' (17)
Then Pratt restates his commitment saying, "I feel called upon by the Holy Ghost to forsake my house and home for the gospel's sake; and I will do it, placing both feet firm on these promises with nothing else to rely upon" (17). The concluding statement to the dialogue between the two brothers is especially crucial. Parley writes, "We parted. He to his business, I to my preparations for a mission which should only end with my life" (17).

This last statement takes on a double meaning in retrospect. First, Pratt's dedication to God is a life-long one and thus can only end when his life ends. In this respect, the statement is a forewarning to the reader that the rest of the narrative will center around Pratt's doing "all he can do" by "forsaking father or mother, brethren or sisters, houses or lands, wife or children" (17) in search of salvation. The second meaning of the above statement is that, Pratt, whether knowingly or not, has foreshadowed his death as a martyr for his faith.

Edwards too said that he "made a solemn dedication of [himself] to God" (126); however, it was not intended as an act to earn salvation, but rather a manifestation of his having received the grace of God. The irony is that Edwards, who felt he had already received grace, produced a personal narrative which seems self-deprecating and lacking in
confidence. He writes, "When I look into my heart and take a view of my wickedness, it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell" (130). Edwards seems to portray himself as fallen and helpless so that the glory is given to God and his grace.

Pratt, in contrast, was still hoping at the end of his life that he could have "grace to endure to the end, and be saved in the kingdom of God" (409). Yet he seems more confident than Edwards about his salvation. In fact, in his last poem written the year he died, called "My Fiftieth Year," Pratt lists the things he has done in his life of dedication and then asks to have a rest, just as the children of Israel had a Jubilee year after seven times seven years. His feeling of contentment seems to display a confidence in his potential salvation because he has done all he could do and now only awaits the grace of God to relieve him of his burden. Thus, although both narratives center on grace as the key to salvation, only Pratt’s includes work in the equation.

These varying perspectives on grace may account for the differing lengths of the two narratives--Pratt’s consists of over 400 pages and Edwards’ approximately ten in the editions to which I refer. Shea points out that in comparison to other spiritual autobiographies “the 'Personal
Narrative' is relatively brief . . . but it is not incomplete" (207). Shea continues by saying that,

Like all autobiographers, secular or spiritual, Edwards fashioned a coherent narrative by using his total experience selectively; we judge it incomplete only by our curiosity about the interior life of his last harrowing years. He could scarcely have added a word to the felt distillation of all he ever thought on all that finally mattered. (207-08)

"All that mattered" to Edwards' spiritual salvation was the grace of God. Once he had received grace and recorded its manifestation in his narrative, he had worked out his salvation. Edwards did not need to evidence his salvation by works; thus, the struggles of his later years and his service with the Native Americans essentially had little to do with his quest for salvation and as a result, nothing to do with his "Personal Narrative." Like Edwards, "all that mattered" to Pratt was his quest for salvation, and his autobiography is a record of that quest. However, because the Mormon covenant of grace includes not only the grace of God but also "all we can do," Pratt's autobiography is essentially a record of his "works" in a faith-works equation.
In stressing Pratt's emphasis on works I do not imply that his narrative is devoid of evidence of the grace of God at work in his life. Pratt's autobiography is filled with miracles, visions, and prophecies which are meant to attest to the hand of God in his life. The distinction I am making is that Pratt never implies that he has received the final approval and grace of God as Edwards and Calvinist doctrine do. The major portion of the *Autobiography* is devoted to an account of Pratt's works.

Although Edwards and Pratt emphasize their own spiritual salvation by grace, they also desire to help others do the same. As mentioned, Couser calls this tendency of autobiographers to try to influence readers and history through their narratives, prophetic autobiography. And Couser examines specifically how Jonathan Edwards plays the part of prophetic autobiographer in the "Personal Narrative."

One characteristic of prophetic autobiography is that it "flourishes in times of crisis--when change threatens communal values or when historical developments demand new modes of interpretation" (Couser, *American 3*). Such a crisis or historical development was occurring during the years of 1739 and 1746 when, as Couser states, "Edwards was preoccupied with the Great Awakening" (3).
“The Great Awakening was the most significant historical influence on Edwards' narrative” (Couser American 23). Because the Great Awakening was a time of Puritan revival in America and reemphasis on God's covenant of grace, the “Personal Narrative” prophetically exemplifies this experience of grace. Couser writes: “The narrative was intended to serve as a guide to self-examination and the examination of others in this process.” He then asserts that “Edwards employed a distinction between true and false religious affections in such a way as to validate the spiritual nature of the Awakening as a whole while criticizing certain of its embarrassing excesses” (American 23).

Couser's definition of a prophetic autobiographer also states that his “presumption that he possesses a vision justifying his prophetic stance is matched by his sense of the community's need for it and perhaps balanced by his recognition that the vision is their's as much as it is his” (3). Edwards did not address his narrative to any specific person as did many other Puritans, which makes it at once private and universal. Couser believes that Edwards made his “Personal Narrative” a guide to the experience of grace, which in itself may not make it a prophetic autobiography. But Edwards does fill the role of prophetic autobiographer because of the time in which he wrote--during the Great Awakening--and
the way in which he made his narrative a universal model for Puritans to follow in order to receive grace and revive the Puritan faith.

The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt can also be considered prophetic autobiography in the same manner as Edwards' "Personal Narrative." First, Pratt's autobiography was produced in a time of change that threatened communal values and thus constituted an important historical development. During the settlement of communities in Utah, the focus of Church members had shifted somewhat from spiritual matters to a greater emphasis on temporal concerns: "Many members of the Church had drifted into spiritual lethargy as they struggled to survive on the frontier" (Church History 365). Pratt wrote a large portion of his autobiography during this period, referred to as "the reformation"--a massive effort on the part of Church leaders to help members rededicate themselves to living the principles of Mormonism. Pratt may have sensed a need at this time for his autobiography to strengthen the commitment of members in the community to the Church.

Pratt represents an interesting marriage between the styles of Edwards and Franklin. His writing carries many Puritan characteristics with it, but as I have shown, it has a unique focus on works, a component missing in Puritan narratives. In its emphasis on works and its style,
Pratt's autobiography actually resembles Franklin's more closely, thus associating itself with the next movement in American autobiography.

The Autobiographies of Benjamin Franklin and Parley P. Pratt

Shea ruminates on the category for Franklin's Autobiography in his work Spiritual Autobiography, saying, "Is [Franklin's] the last Puritan autobiography, a translation of the narrative of salvation into secular terms? Or is Franklin the first authentic American autobiographer, displaying in his rise to success a mythic embodiment of the New World's possibilities" (234)? Shea suggests that both positions may be true, but asserts that "in nineteenth-century America, Franklin was imitated more by deed than by autobiographical word, whereas the form and ingredients of early spiritual autobiography proved viable in a number of major contributions to American literature, among them Walden [and] Song of Myself" (234-35).

By placing Pratt into the nineteenth-century canon, we are able to challenge Shea's opinion. Pratt is one autobiographer who imitated Franklin in deed as well as "by autobiographical word." Looking at Franklin's autobiography in light of his quest for yet another kind of salvation allows us to marry both of Shea's propositions. Franklin is Puritan in that he seeks salvation; however, his quest is secularized when
he makes his success story a symbol of self-obtained public salvation. Just as Edwards reveals the characteristics of one who has received grace from God, so Franklin shows us the characteristics of one who has received grace in the public eye. Whether Pratt was influenced by reading Franklin's autobiography is not certain; there is no documentation to indicate one way or the other, but the fact that he combined the narrative of salvation by grace similar to Edwards and the salvation by public grace and self-works, like Franklin, makes him a type of pivotal figure in nineteenth-century autobiography. Most scholars account for only two kinds of autobiography in the nineteenth century—spiritual like Edwards' or secular like Franklin's—but not both at once.

The ways in which Franklin achieved public grace or secular salvation were many. Critics have usually grouped them under three headings that correspond to the three sections of Franklin's Autobiography. First, his rise to prominence from "unlikely Beginnings," next, his self-teaching which includes his "Project of arriving at moral Perfection," and finally, his public contributions and benevolence.

To begin with, Franklin addresses his autobiography to his son, which Shea reminds us was a Puritan practice and was also a justification for Franklin's autobiography (239-40). Franklin writes, "having emerged
from the Poverty & Obscurity in which I was born & bred, to a State of Affluence & some Degree of Reputation in the World . . . the conducing Means I made use of my Posterity may like to know, as they may find some of them suitable to their own situations, & therefore fit to be imitated" (3). Franklin prepares the reader through this introduction to be impressed and to value this as a success story. All the experiences included in the first section of the Autobiography have thus been carefully selected to show his rise to success.

Franklin reveals an interesting characteristic of the genre in his first two pages. He writes that if he had his life to live over again he "should have no Objection to a Repetition of the same Life from its Beginning, only asking the Advantages Authors have in a second Edition to correct some Faults of the first" (3). He aptly states that "the next Thing most like living one's Life over again seems to be a Recollection of that Life" (4). Franklin does not say so directly, but we assume that he will indeed create a "second Edition" of his life by correcting or reconciling himself to his faults as he writes his autobiography. Thus, as Sayre submits, "Franklin used the Autobiography to compose himself" (21).

One simple instance of this "reconciliation" is Franklin's recounting a story from his childhood when he and some friends stole some stones in
order to build their own wharf. When Franklin was reprimanded by his father, he pled that the taking was useful because it was work; however, he wrote that his father convinced him "that nothing was useful which was not honest" (10). By Franklin's recounting this story of dishonesty, the reader is to assume that he had success in gaining the virtue of honesty. Franklin is not alone in using autobiography as a mode of personal recomposition.

Pratt also uses his autobiography to recompose his life, justifying some of his mistakes so that he appears more successful. This issue will be especially apparent as I discuss Franklin's second section on self-teaching. Until then one example may suffice. Pratt does seem to be recomposing his life when he includes an episode where he is being held prisoner by an angry mob and possibly awaiting death. Pratt is questioned by a former friend, "now a Judas:" "Well, Parley, you have now got where you are certain never to escape; how do you feel as to the course you have taken in religion?" Pratt wrote, "I answered, 'that I had taken that course which I should take if I had my life to live over again'" (161). Both Franklin and Pratt write confident narratives, affirming the actions they took in their lives so that their autobiographies take on the form of success stories.
Franklin is careful to paint his early beginnings humble enough to make his "emerging" from them seem a greater success. In the first part of the Autobiography, Franklin tells of his first coming to Philadelphia. According to Sayre, "The famous arrival in Philadelphia, 'eating my Roll,' is recognized to have enormous emblematic value, and the elder Franklin does all he can to bring out the contrast" (19). Franklin says he gave this story emphasis "that you may in your Mind compare such unlikely Beginnings with the Figure I have since made there" (27). But as Sayre points out, "Franklin was not quite the penniless waif he made himself out to be. He had arrived tired from the boat journey down the Delaware River, he had spent his last pocket money, and he had no change of clothes. But his luggage was coming around from New York by ship" (19).

Pratt too emphasizes certain experiences in his youth in order to accentuate his rise to prominence in the Mormon Church. His experience in school quoted earlier is one example of his emphasis on humble "beginnings." Another is the stress he places on his thankless work in the hire of others and his struggles of losing his family farm before he can finally write, "The following spring found me 21 years of age, married and settled in a log dwelling, in the midst of a small clearing made with my own hands, in the place where I had spent the previous winter in solitude"
(12). Yet even this success is meant to seem small in comparison to his finally becoming an important leader among the Mormons. Even though Pratt paints a humble picture of his beginnings, he clearly wants to give a sense of progression to his preparation for Apostleship, so his beginnings are not as "unlikely" as Franklin's.

Both Franklin and Pratt trace some of their success to an early love of books. Franklin writes, "From a Child I was fond of Reading, and all the little Money that came into my Hands was ever laid out in Books" (13). In fact, the preliminary information in the first section of the Autobiography leads to Franklin's choice of career--as a printer of books (Sayre 25). Pratt too loved books. He stresses this through a passage in his autobiography:

But I always loved a book. If I worked hard, a book was in my hand in the morning while others were sitting down to breakfast; the same at noon; if I had a few moments, a book! a BOOK! A book at evening, while others slept or sported; a book on Sundays; a book at every leisure moment of my life. (2)

This love of books led to both men becoming successful publishers of periodicals and books, an achievement of which both were proud. Franklin said of his pride that he never had success in acquiring the virtue of
humility, but he had "a good deal with regard for the Appearance of it" (102). However, neither man bothered even to appear humble in talking of his writing successes. In referring to his Poor Richard's Almanac, for example, Franklin said, "I endeavored to make it both entertaining and useful, and it accordingly came to be in such Demand that I reap'd considerable Profit from it, vending annually near ten Thousand" (106). Likewise Pratt wrote of his most famous book, A Voice of Warning:

The first edition of this work consisted of four thousand copies; it has since been published and re-published in America and Europe, till some forty or fifty thousand copies have not been sufficient to supply the demand. Thousands date their conversion to the fullness of the gospel to the reading of that book. (144)

The second section of Franklin's Autobiography deals with his process of self-teaching. According to Sayre, this act is important to the writing of autobiography, and of "the most important models for autobiography in America," Franklin and St. Augustine (3), Franklin is important for his model of self-teaching and Augustine for his literary form. In Sayre's opinion, "Good autobiography requires both an idea of
literary form and a capacity to record the progress and process of self-teaching” (7).

Franklin’s self-teaching centers around his “Project of arriving at moral Perfection” (90). The impetus for this project was Franklin’s wanting “to live without committing any Fault at any time” (90). The older and wiser Franklin allows himself to be more vulnerable and less perfect. He continues, “As I knew, or thought I knew, what was right and wrong, I did not see why I might not always do the one and avoid the other” (91). Franklin had named his “Thirteen Virtues” and set out to perfect one each week until he had reached moral perfection. His failure at this project was then used as a model of self-teaching, and, as stated earlier, he “forgave himself for any lapses” (Leibowitz 49).

In this section, Franklin becomes simultaneously, as Minter calls it, the “projecting man of action” and the “observing man of interpretation” (85). He looks back on the man of action and shows his weakness but then produces a lesson from the mistake, admitting that he “fell far short” of obtaining perfection, but adding, “yet I was by the endeavor a better and a happier Man than I otherwise should have been, if I had not attempted it” (99). Franklin becomes the self-teacher who recognizes that he has
learned from his mistake, but that "method tends, however gradually, toward improvement" (Shea 245).

Pratt too speaks of his mistakes, and like Franklin, is able to turn them into instances of self-teaching which then portray him as a better man. During the Kirtland period of Mormon history there was a rather widespread apostasy, and many once-faithful saints left the Church because of their dissatisfaction with Joseph Smith's handling of financial matters. Pratt was among those who spoke out against Smith at this time. He wrote of the experience in his autobiography:

I also was overcome by the [spirit of apostasy], and it seemed as if the very powers of darkness which war against the Saints were let loose upon me. But the Lord knew my faith, my zeal, my integrity of purpose, and he gave me the victory.

I went to brother Joseph Smith in tears, and, with a broken heart and contrite spirit, confessed wherein I had erred in spirit, murmured, or done or said amiss. He frankly forgave me, prayed for me and blessed me. Thus, by experience, I learned more fully to discern and to contrast the two spirits, and to resist the one and cleave to the other. And, being
tempted in all points, even as others, I learned how to bear
with, and excuse, and succor those who are tempted. (144)

Pratt gives as few details as possible in describing his near
apostasy, instead he focuses on the lesson learned and the asset it has
become because he can now “succor those who are tempted.”

Later Pratt is chastised by Brigham Young for some reason, not
clearly explained, on his way to the Salt Lake Valley. Exactly what Pratt’s
response was at the time of chastisement when he was the “man of
action” we cannot be sure, but his response as recorded by the “observing
man of interpretation” was one showing gratitude for a lesson learned.
Pratt wrote that he probably deserved the chastisement, he was humbled
by it, and he asked for forgiveness. Then he presents the lesson learned:
“This school of experience made me more humble and careful in future,
and I think it was the means of making me a wiser and better man ever
after” (331). Recounted in a single paragraph, this experience was
intentionally not emphasized.

Leibowitz observes that Franklin’s Autobiography lacks “those
moments of uncertainty, terror, or anxiety that most autobiographers,
from the Puritan minister Jonathan Edwards to the novelist Richard
Wright, single out” (29-30). In making their autobiographies schools of
self-education for all to attend, Franklin and Pratt make formerly
difficult and perhaps, at the time, terrible experiences, positive learning
experiences on the road to their success and salvation in the world. They
do not allow mistakes to dampen their image, but instead turn them
around so, as individuals, they appear more worthy of public grace. Their
autobiographies are used as opportunities to compose themselves into
important and successful public figures worthy of emulation and
historical immortality. To borrow the Apostle Paul's words, they "work
out [their] own salvation" in their histories, but instead of doing so with
"fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:11), they exhibit neither remorse nor
trembling--only the benefits of self-teaching.

Franklin and Pratt both seem to have wanted their narratives to
speak to others and teach the lessons they learned. Sayre said that
Franklin's Autobiography "was as necessary to the making of America as
his other domestic improvements like the lightning rod and the
'Pennsylvanian Fire-place.' And just as he never patented these
inventions, but allowed anyone to imitate them, he had no objections to
others' imitating his worthy life" (Autobiography: Essays 156). In this
and other respects, Franklin wrote a prophetic autobiography according to
Couser's criteria.
Couser suggests that Franklin was seeking a "practical modern alternative" to Puritan self-examination when he included his method of self-improvement, or Thirteen Virtues, into his autobiography (Couser, American 47). Rather than anguished introspection or a personal relationship with God, Franklin was simply trying to foster "objective self-knowledge and demonstrable improvement in moral conduct" (Couser, American 48). Thus, Franklin was exhorting and exemplifying as a prophet would but because of his deism was not a prophet in the traditional religious sense. As Couser articulates, "[Franklin's] intent is no less didactic than the Puritan autobiographer's; however, the process is not one of passing on lessons taught by God but one of creating a model of self-education" (Couser, American 44-45).

Franklin's autobiography also moves into the prophetic realm in the second section when he engages in "philanthropic endeavors" and "benevolent public service" (Couser, American 47). A letter from Benjamin Vaughan, encouraging Franklin to finish and publish his autobiography, is placed between the first two sections. Vaughan wrote, "All that has happened to you is also connected with the detail of the manners and situation of a rising people; and in this respect I do not think
that the writings of Caesar and Tacitus can be more interesting to a true judge of human nature and society" (qtd. in Franklin 80).

In part two, most likely in response to this letter, Franklin produces the analogy between his experience and his country's: "Franklin was revealing, in his autobiography, how he had created himself as an American and how much he had contributed to the creation of the nation" (Couser, American 48-49). Although he sacrificed the "supramundane viewpoint of the prophet" (Couser, American 49), he still conflated "individual and communal narratives, to describe--and even prescribe--both histories according to some exalted vision of their destinies . . . in order to exert moral . . . leverage on the course of actual events" (Couser, Altered vii). This combining of community and personal histories and Franklin's focus on his contributions to his "rising" nation show a distinct prophetic concern to help build his fellow men through his autobiography.

Pratt's is a prophetic autobiography in many of the same ways: he is passing on lessons through a model of self-education and combining his own history with that of his community to exert moral leverage on the course of actual events. Pratt, however, goes beyond Franklin in that he adopts a divine, or other-worldly viewpoint--including lessons learned
from God—and thus tries to exert spiritual leverage on the actions of his fellow beings.

For instance, Pratt’s conversion story is a lesson from God, yet he also interprets it as an experience of self-learning. Pratt tells us of his many questions and doctrinal problems with existing religions of his day. He questions the authority of the ministers to perform ordinances and does not see why he needs to have had the experience of grace before he is baptized. His search for answers does not discourage him from preaching, however, because he “felt in duty bound to enlighten mankind, so far as God had enlightened [him]” (14). While preaching, Pratt is educated by God and eventually finds the Book of Mormon.

He had spent his last dollars for canal-boat passage to Albany when he suddenly felt he must leave the boat before reaching their destination: “Why, [he] did not know; but it was plainly manifest by the Spirit to [him]” (18). All Pratt knew was that he had work to perform in the area. So he left his wife on the boat, promising to come to her when the mysterious work had been performed. Pratt wrote, “My wife would have objected to this; but she had seen the hand of God so plainly manifest in His dealings with me many times, that she dare not oppose the things manifest to me by His spirit” (18). When Pratt found the Book of Mormon the second day
after leaving the boat, no missionary was involved in his conversion; it was just Pratt and the book—self-education. He said, "I felt a strange interest in the book" and continues,

I read all day; eating was a burden, I had no desire for food; sleep was a burden when the night came, for I preferred reading to sleep.

As I read, the spirit of the Lord was upon me, and I knew and comprehended that the book was true, as plainly and manifestly as a man comprehends and knows that he exists. My joy was now full, as it were, and I rejoiced sufficiently to more than pay me for all the sorrows, sacrifices and toils of my life. (20)

Pratt's conversion story is not the traditional Puritan experience where grace comes independent of the works of the recipient. And unlike most Mormon conversion narratives, he is not taught the gospel by someone else. Like Franklin, Pratt gives us a model of self-education. He adds the element of self-teaching to the grace of God and produces a narrative which is a marriage of the polarities of Edwards and Franklin.

Pratt's choice to combine his own history with that of the "rising" organization of the Church is important. He not only exerts moral
leverage, as Franklin did, but he also wishes to provide spiritual influence. Pratt’s conflation of the two histories is obviously intended to either strengthen the reader’s commitment to the restored gospel or to promote conversion. Yet, by combining the two histories he also provides an opportunity to portray himself as a great leader who indeed becomes a man of “wisdom and talent in the world,” as his childhood teacher had prophesied. The emphasis on his own works reveals a desire for the same kind of salvation for which Franklin sought—a salvation accompanied by grace in the public eye.

Walden and The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt

Thoreau’s brand of salvation differs from Edwards’ and Franklin’s, and yet draws from each. According to Minter, “knowing that neither Edwards’ nor Franklin’s answer—‘Neither the New Testament nor Poor Richard’—spoke to his ‘condition,’ Thoreau sought to live the unified life in which all activity and all utterance would be spontaneously poetic” (87). Thoreau was trying to unite what Minter calls the “man of action,” with “the observing man of interpretation.”

With his experiment and his writing of Walden, I see Thoreau making himself into the man of action, trying to act out the ideas of the observing man of interpretation—in this case, Emerson. I think Pratt had a similar
relationship to Joseph Smith, so that Pratt’s autobiography can be seen as a written account of the man of action putting into practice the doctrines which Joseph Smith, the interpreter, had established.

The main connection between Pratt’s autobiography and Walden is that both escaped the constraints of “civilized life” in order to find inner peace in nature (Thoreau 1). Thoreau went to the woods to “live deliberately” and to “front only the essential facts of life” so as to “reduce [life] to its lowest terms” and be able to “give a true account of it” (61). In similar manner Pratt said, “I resolved to bid farewell to the civilized world--where I had met with little else but disappointment, sorrow and unrewarded toil; and where sectarian divisions disgusted and ignorance perplexed me--and to spend the remainder of my days in the solitudes of the great West” (9). Pratt, like Thoreau, was tired of the teachings of modern Christianity, and was also unable to find the worldly success that Franklin preached even after hard toil in traditional public life. Thus, he, like Thoreau, left civilization to find salvation outside worldly constraints.

Building his own house at Walden is an important part of Thoreau’s search for poetic salvation. He writes, “Who knows but if men constructed their dwellings with their own hands, and provided food for
themselves and families simply and honestly enough, the poetic faculty would be universally developed” (31). If Thoreau’s theory is true, then Pratt’s frequent house building could account for his great productivity in poetry and hymn writing. For not only does he build a small home similar to Thoreau’s when he first escapes from civilization, but he soon built another house close to the first, just outside of Cleveland, Ohio. Then he built at least two houses in Missouri, one in Kirtland, Ohio, and at least two in Nauvoo, all of which he was forced to leave because of religious persecution. Finally in Salt Lake, Pratt built additional houses for himself and his wives.

The forest homes of both Thoreau and Pratt take on important meaning as the narratives progress. According to Sherman Paul, “The building of [Thoreau’s] hut is so thoroughly described because on the symbolic level it is the description of the building of the body for his soul” (Thoreau 357). Thoreau also used the metaphor of the seasons to accentuate his house metaphor. He finally inhabited his house in the winter and wrote, “I weathered some merry snow storms, and spent some cheerful winter evenings by my fire-side, while the snow whirled wildly without” (170). As Sherman Paul notes, “By the fireside, in the period of reflection and inner life, he lingered most, communing with his self”
Winter in his own small house was a similar time for Pratt, who wrote:

The storms of winter raged around me; the wind shook the forest, the wolf howled in the distance, and the owl chimed in harshly to complete the doleful music which seemed to soothe me, or bid me welcome to this holy retreat. But in my little cabin the fire blazed pleasantly, and the Holy Scriptures and a few other books occupied my hours of solitude. (10)

Both Thoreau and Pratt created dwellings in which they were protected from outer influences and free to feed their souls.

Spring is also important for both Thoreau and Pratt. Thoreau points to the redemptive qualities of spring when he looks at Walden Pond returning to life. He even concludes his narrative when spring has come because, after an entire year at Walden, which he observes through the mirror of the pond in all its seasons (summer's action, fall and winter's introspection, and spring's rebirth), he had truly seen himself and reached poetic salvation.

Pratt also concludes his escape from "civilization" in the spring when he resolves to leave his small cabin, build a permanent abode in that place, and return to civilization to marry Thankful Halsey. Unlike Thoreau,
however, Pratt had not concluded his experiment nor obtained his salvation when he left his cabin. During the next two winters of contemplation Pratt retreats again from civilization, both physically and spiritually, and never permanently returns. From this point on Pratt has his permanent dwellings on the frontier and only returns to "civilization" as a missionary. He is also detached from the concerns of the world to a certain extent, working to obtain his eternal salvation through sacrificing his mortal life in service to God.

Thoreau had achieved his poetic salvation after he left his cabin and finished writing *Walden*. He had sought to live poetically for its own sake and thus had no other ambition and no other history to tell. Perhaps, this is why his autobiographical writing seems so different from Franklin's and Edwards'. *Walden* was not about public success nor the obtaining of grace as most previous autobiographies had been. It was about living poetically. As Sayre explained, Thoreau, like the other writers of the American Renaissance, had not "met one of the major requirements of autobiography: they hadn't done anything. . . . Thoreau, meanwhile, had found his outlet by doing something so cranky, going out to be instead of do that an accounting was justified" (*The American* 23).
Walden represents all that Thoreau wanted out of life. Emerson summed it up best: "Had [Thoreau's] genius been only contemplative, he had been fitted to his life, but with his energy and practical ability he seemed born for great enterprise and for command: and I so much regret the loss of his rare powers of action, that I cannot help counting it a fault in him that he had no ambition" (Thoreau 331). Walden then is a manifestation of Thoreau's contemplative genius and his power of action working simultaneously. But his lack of ambition, beyond being poetic, is how he differs most strikingly from Pratt.

Pratt's interest in poetic expression is evidenced by his interspersion of poetry with the narrative in his autobiography, and his careful composition of each event in his life. However, Pratt's ultimate ambition was not poetic in nature, but eternal, and he soon decided his objective required the complete sacrifice of this world and all its possessions and enticements. During his third and final winter in his forest dwelling, Pratt "felt drawn out in an extraordinary manner to search the prophets, and to pray for an understanding of the same" (14). This is the point at which he decides to leave his farm in order to preach the gospel, as mentioned previously.
Thoreau was also willing to sacrifice worldly possessions. He wrote, "A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone" (55), and later, "In accumulating property for ourselves or our posterity, in founding a family or a state, or acquiring fame even, we are mortal; but in dealing with truth we are immortal, and need fear no change nor accident" (67). However, Thoreau's philosophies were not backed by the ambition to apply them for any reason other than for his own poetic image.

Pratt, in contrast, had such a strong ambition that he actually did in the end what Thoreau only contemplated. Pratt's ambition to sacrifice this life in pursuit of the next grows continually throughout his narrative. In *Walden* Thoreau says "How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book" (73). This is certainly true of Pratt who dated a new era of commitment and sacrifice from reading the Book of Mormon. He describes the culminating commitment as occurring in 1839, when he is making his escape from prison. After Pratt has exhausted his energy running from the mob he prays,

> O Lord, strengthen me this once, deliver me from my persecutors and bring me in safety to a land of liberty, and I will praise thy name and give thee all the glory, and the
remnant of my days shall be wholly devoted to thy service; for surely my life is now at stake, and if preserved, it is thy gift, therefore I shall owe it all to thee. (218)

After attaining freedom Pratt does devote his life to the Lord and never loses his ambition for eternal salvation through the sacrifice of this life. It was while serving a mission that Pratt was murdered by his twelfth wife's legal husband, who was accompanied by other anti-Mormons. Pratt's last words were, "I die a firm believer in the Gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith, and I wish you to carry this my dying testimony. I know that the Gospel is true and that Joseph Smith was a prophet of the living God, I am dying a martyr to the faith" (Pratt, "Eleanor" 248). Poetically, Pratt offered the ultimate sacrifice--his life.

Although Pratt did work at poetry as did Thoreau, his poetry was mainly a compositional concern and an integrated part of his autobiography--not the final end of his existence and the path to salvation. In retrospect, Pratt could probably have written poems and poetic sermons about his experiences and have made his life a piece of art, but what he was doing wasn't for art's sake. Pratt didn't try to live
poetically like Thoreau; however, through his quest for eternal salvation he created material for a poetic life narrative.

In approaching autobiography self-consciously, Thoreau created a prophetic autobiography in at least one sense of the term. The events in *Walden* were "enacted with conscious artistic and prophetic intent instead of being shaped retrospectively for a certain effect" such that they were "prospective rather than retrospective--prophetic in the predictive sense" (Couser, *American* 64, 65).

*Walden* can be considered prophetic autobiography in other ways as well. Couser believes it reveals that "Thoreau desired to perform the traditional prophet's role of isolating and perpetuating the spiritual values of the community, and by doing so, facilitate the unfolding of God's plan in their history" (69). He uses Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" as an example, reminding us that Thoreau's night in jail came during the *Walden* years. According to Couser "Civil Disobedience," like *Walden*, produced a "double pattern of prophetic action" (69). The first part of this pattern was "the considered symbolic act" and the second part was "the commentary interpreting and justifying the act" (69). Again the dual man of action and of interpretation is at work.
Pratt performed such prophetic tasks in his autobiography as well. Pratt would often expound doctrine from Joseph Smith. Initially, he might show his struggle to gain a testimony of the doctrine and would then write the account of his application of the doctrine in his life—a prophetic act which exhibits action and interpretation. Most of Pratt’s actions were not symbolic in quite the same way as Thoreau’s. They went beyond symbolism, requiring a greater commitment to the principle in question. Having been thrown in jail, driven from three different homes, and called to leave his family to serve missions, Pratt obviously executed stronger prophetic acts than spending a single night in jail or two years in a cabin which was actually rather close to civilization. Pratt clearly isolated and perpetuated the spiritual values of the community through his actions and the subsequent recording of those acts.

One specific example is evident when Pratt relates an incident that teaches the reader to trust in the Lord, even in very difficult conditions. When Pratt was sent to Toronto to serve a mission he was destitute and knew no one there. He needed money and help but wrote that it was difficult to expect aid because he was entirely unknown in a strange place. Nevertheless, he wrote, “The Spirit seemed to whisper to me to try the Lord, and see if anything was too hard for him” (113). Pratt writes of his
praying in the forest and then entering the nearby town. He continues, "I had not tarried many minutes before I was accosted by a stranger, who inquired my name and where I was going. He also asked me if I did not want some money. I said yes. He then gave me ten dollars and letter of introduction to John Taylor, of Toronto, where I arrived the same evening" (113-14). Thus, with this story Pratt isolates the doctrine of complete trust in the Lord, demonstrates how he acted upon it, and prophesies that it can also happen in the life of the reader.

Couser states that for Thoreau, "prophecy was to take the form of criticizing society from a transcendent viewpoint" (69). Much of Thoreau's narrative consists of direct assaults on the values of the reader. For example he writes, "The greater part of what my neighbors call good I believe in my soul to be bad, and if I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior" (10). Thoreau's use of sarcasm and satire cause his wisdom to appear superior, allowing it to be more acceptable to the reader. When Thoreau criticizes Franklin, for example, he does it in a "brief parody of the success story in 'Economy'" (Couser, American 65-66). Couser suggests further how Thoreau, in his account of moving to Walden Pond, portrayed himself just as Franklin had when he moved to Philadelphia. He writes:
Having failed to gain the appreciation and support of his townspeople for his service as "inspector of snowstorms" and "surveyor . . . of forest paths," Thoreau determines "to go into business at once," and select Walden as a "good port" due to the advantages of the ice trade and the railroad. The facts of his predicament, of course, made any such rationale patently absurd; his true purpose, punningly revealed, was evangelical rather than entrepreneurial--to get his faithfully kept accounts audited at last. In addition to reversing Franklin's progression from private to public life, Thoreau demolished the kind of opportunistic reasoning on which Franklin's career had been built. (65-66)

Pratt too uses criticism and satire, usually to combat religious leaders who opposed his work. There are a number of humorous, sarcastic comments to other preachers in Pratt's narrative. Since he reproduces the dialogue in retrospect, he is able to make himself even more eloquent in confounding the other preachers. The following example is Pratt's response to the criticism of a Baptist minister, Mr. Dotson. Dotson had rejected Pratt's message because it included the doctrine of continuing revelation, and he held that there could be no revelation after the New
Testament. Pratt then set Dotson up for defeat when he questions him about his own call to the ministry. Dotson told Pratt he was “called by a vocal voice from Heaven.” Pratt replied:

Well, Mr Dotson, there is one exception to your general rule. We come to you with a new revelation, and you reject it, because there can be no new revelation; and yet you profess to have a new revelation, God having spoken from the heavens and called you, and commissioned you to preach eighteen hundred years after the New Testament was written, and all revelation finished! How is this? (68)

Certainly Pratt had his own brand of criticism which lent him the same type of authority or “prophetic” voice as Thoreau enjoyed with his critical “transcendent viewpoint.”

Finally, Couser considers Thoreau’s Walden as an example of the prophetic mode of autobiography because Thoreau is trying to conflate his narrative with that of the nation in order to become a prophet of freedom in this relatively new movement. Says Couser, “Thus, in moving to Walden on July 4, Thoreau also invoked the American Revolution as context for his experience. For Thoreau, the Revolution had been, at best, incomplete because it had not brought about true freedom” (71). Couser even suggests
that Thoreau "must have seen himself as superseding Franklin as the 
educator of Americans in the areas of independence, economy, and nature" 
(71).

Similarly, Pratt saw himself not only as a prophet to the Saints, but 
to the nation as well. Many aspects of his narrative show that Pratt 
intended it to be read by people outside his faith, particularly his 
portrayal of the injustices Mormons suffered in this "free" nation. 
Interestingly, Pratt also invoked July 4 in some of his inclusions in the 
Autobiography. For example, he escapes to freedom from an unjust 
imprisonment, leaves Winter Quarters to flee to freedom in the Salt Lake 
Valley, proposes to his first wife Thankful, and is asked to give a speech 
to non-Mormons on a boat—all on July 4. Pratt says of giving the speech, 
"I refused for awhile; but at length complied, on conditions that steerage 
passengers, boat hands, firemen, and all classes, black or white, should 
have the privilege of assembling in the cabin to hear the discourse" (65). 
Mentioning the details of this Independence Day Speech, Pratt is obviously 
affirming his great benevolent interpretation of the Declaration of 
Independence, that all men are created equal. He is also asserting himself 
as a prophet to the nation.
After every episode recounting the injustices of the nation toward the Saints, Pratt includes a statement like the following. Here the Saints have been driven from Missouri, and he has been locked in prison on bogus terms:

Is it possible! Have I been recording the history of realities as the scenes transpired in the broad light of the nineteenth century--in the boasted land of liberty--and in the most renowned republic now existing on the globe? Alas! it is too true; would to God it were a dream--a novel, a romance that had no existence save in the wild region of fancy. But the prison door yet grating on its hinges,--the absence of my wife and little ones,--the gloom of the dungeon where I yet repose,--these and ten thousand other things cause me to think that my almost incredible narrative is no fiction, but an awful reality--a fact more truly distressing than my feeble tongue or pen can find words to set forth. (193)

Obviously Pratt, like Thoreau is trying to enact the true freedom for which the Revolution was fought.

In his conclusion to American Autobiography: The Prophetic Mode, Couser says of the autobiographies he has studied, including Edwards'
“Personal Narrative,” Franklin’s Autobiography, and Thoreau’s Walden: “That we continue to read these books after their particular crises have passed suggests their success as prophecy. For they speak to the perpetual crisis of being American, of living with the contradictions of that identity” (200). Likewise, the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt is still read in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints because it still speaks to the perpetual crisis of being a Latter-day Saint. According to Couser’s criteria, the Autobiography is clearly prophetic.

In many ways the Autobiography has come to represent the universal Mormon experience. Pratt’s stories of his conversion, his missionary experiences, and his interactions with the major characters of the Restoration have become folklore and archetypal. These are stories that early and modern Saints have personalized and related again and again. In an article on Mormon folklore, William A. Wilson identifies various kinds of stories which Mormons pass on verbally and personalize to “fit the interests and meet the needs of their listeners” (48). Wilson identifies various types of missionary stories, most of which can be found in Pratt’s narrative. Further study could be done investigating how Pratt’s autobiography has instigated and perpetuated Mormon folklore into modern times. In yet another sense the Autobiography is prophetic because it
still speaks to Mormons today who might repeat Pratt’s stories, sometimes with changed names or details.

Film is another medium through which the *Autobiography* still lives and thus qualifies as “prophetic autobiography”. Recently Pratt’s conversion experience was made into a movie entitled *How Rare A Possession*, the narrative of which was taken almost verbatim from the *Autobiography*. This film was designed to renew appreciation for the Book of Mormon. Another Mormon film, *Legacy*, uses some of Pratt’s words from the *Autobiography* as dialogue for a female character. The woman in the film says of Winter Quarters that, “The lateness of the season, the poverty of the people, and, above all, the taking away of five hundred of our best men, finally compelled us to abandon any further progress westward till the return of another spring” (Pratt, *Autobiography* 311).

Pratt’s narrative is also an essential component of most Mormon Church history books. The *Autobiography* has provided accounts that are essential to Mormon historiography. Often his is the only primary source of historical information on early Church history. Latter-day Saints continue to be influenced by his theological arguments and sing hymns which he composed and included in the *Autobiography*. Pratt’s autobiography is prophetic, not only because it speaks to us today, but
also, for Mormons, in a more literal sense than Couser implies. Mormons sustain their apostles as “prophets, seers and revelators” so that when Latter-day Saints read the Autobiography, they consider it as having been written by a literal prophet (McConkie 701).

Yet the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt does not just speak to the Mormon experience. It can also still speak to the American experience in general. Thus, it should be included in American studies. Pratt’s autobiography, in the ways that I have shown, is comparable to those of Edwards, Franklin, and Thoreau. And just as these are considered narratives which enlighten the understanding of the American experience, so too does the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt.
III. “Properly Portrayed: The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt

as a Mirror of Culture

The mirror is a compelling metaphor for autobiography, as Thoreau demonstrated with *Walden*. According to Blasing, “Walden Pond and *Walden* were mirrors for Thoreau.” She also suggests that “Thoreau himself becomes a mirror for the reader” (7). This mirror metaphor is also important for the *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt*. Blasing pointed out in referring to *Walden* that “a mirror gains content only in reflecting a beholder” (7). The content of Pratt’s autobiography likewise becomes evident as Americans “look” into it to see a reflection of certain aspects of their culture. Specifically, the *Autobiography* reflects characteristics of nineteenth-century frontier culture, and the early culture of “the American Religion.”

In this chapter, I will first address the subject of Pratt as a mirror for elements of nineteenth-century frontier culture, using the Frontier thesis of Frederick Jackson Turner as a tool for understanding. Next, I will discuss the ways the *Autobiography* reflects Mormon culture. I base part of my argument here on Bloom’s assertion that Mormonism is one of the two major American Religions—the other being the Southern Baptist
Convention (46). By using Bloom's thesis as a tool, I argue that Pratt's autobiography reflects a religion which can provide insight into broad American experiences. My intent is to "properly portray" his autobiography as a mirror of these cultures, thereby revealing its importance to American studies.

**Pratt and Frontier Culture**

The frontier, according to Frederick Jackson Turner, was one of the distinguishing characteristics and determining factors in American history if not the dominant. Turner links the unique environment of the New World to the profound differences between European and American culture. Ray Allen Billington summarizes the Turner thesis, stating, "The most distinctive feature of the environment was 'the existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward'" (The American, 3). Turner and Billington also caution that while the frontier hypothesis is a useful tool, "it is only one of many tools and that any assumption that pioneering alone shaped American civilization is false" (The Frontier 8). In spite of limitations in the Turner thesis, it is useful when talking about Pratt and his autobiography.
Mormon scholar, John Henry Evans, says Pratt "kept himself always on the frontiers of life and thought" (60). Perhaps it is Pratt's frontier characteristics that make him such a representative American for his time, and his autobiography so important as a result. Pratt, in many ways, is the embodiment of Turner's frontier thesis. Because he appropriated space--geographical, spiritual, and intellectual--for his work. For Pratt, there always existed "an area of free land," be that land literal, like the area he first settled in Ohio, or figurative, like the freedom he sought in religion, in philosophical and intellectual musings, or in the promise of eternal salvation. As with the "continuous recession" of free land in America, Pratt was continually striving for and achieving the aims that he set for himself, and then wanting something greater.

Finally, like the epic "advance of American settlement westward," Pratt was usually willing to give up what he had to move westward in search of greater freedom and opportunity. Pratt was so enamored of the frontier that it was in a sense his personal odyssey; he was writing to spiritually forsake this world in pursuit of the next. As Evans hints, Pratt was indeed a frontiersman in both a literal, physical sense, as well as in a more figurative, spiritual.
The idea of applying the Turner thesis to Mormonism is not original. In the 1960s, two scholars addressed the topic. Alexander Evanoff wrote an article in which he determined that "from the birth of the Mormon faith in western New York to the removal of the church to the West, the mainstream of Mormon life may be said to have been conducted under frontier conditions" (161). Davis Bitton took issue with Evanoff and his findings (Bitton 326-33). He expressed his doubt about the effectiveness of applying the Turner thesis to Mormonism. Billington, one of the leading scholars on Turner and his hypothesis, was in favor of Evanoff's reading. Billington compared the two articles, saying Evanoff defined the frontier as Turner would have, in broader terms, and Bitton took too narrow a definition (The American 19-20). I concur with Billington and Evanoff in assuming that Mormonism was a frontier religion. As such, one can then, in a qualified way, apply Turner's thesis.

There is no question that Pratt was in "the mainstream of Mormon life:" his autobiography attests to the fact that he played a central role in almost every major event in early Mormon history. Evanoff's study therefore suggests that Pratt imbibed certain frontier conditions. Even before he joined the Mormon Church he had begun a personal migration, moving "about thirty miles west of Cleveland, in the State of Ohio" (Pratt,
Autobiography 10). Evanoff quotes from one of Pratt's speeches to illustrate certain characteristics in Mormonism exemplifying the Turner Thesis. Pratt delivered the speech at a meeting in the Nauvoo Temple just before the Saints were forced to flee:

One small nursery may produce many thousands of fruit trees, while they are small. But as they expand towards maturity, they must needs be transplanted, in order to have room to grow and produce the natural fruits. It is so with us. We want a country where we have room to expand, and to put in requisition all our energies and the enterprise and talents of a numerous, intelligent and increasing people. (Smith, History 464)

Evanoff points to the similarities between Pratt's words and Turner's thesis, particularly the "emphasis upon transplantation, freedom to develop energies and talents, and room" (170). Pratt's oratory exemplifies the mythic spirit of the frontier. Through his own experience he was part of the frontier-building enterprise. Pratt's life is a vivid example of a quintessential nineteenth-century frontier American.

Pratt records numerous experiences on the frontier, offering the student of American culture important insight into myriad aspects of
frontier life. For instance, he tells of his moving to five different western settlements, thus chronicling his sojourn and his work building homes and cultivating lands. Each time there was a new Mormon migration to a frontier land, Pratt was involved in some way with the move. With the community of Saints moved from western New York; to Kirtland, Ohio; to Far West, Missouri; to Nauvoo, Illinois; and finally to the Great Salt Lake Basin. Pratt provides the reader with interesting and often stirring accounts of each move to a new frontier. His account of the first winter in the Salt Lake Valley is illustrative:

The opening of the year found us and the community generally in good comfortable, temporary log or adobe cabins. . . . Here life was as sweet and the holidays as merry as in the Christian palaces and mansions of those who had driven us to the mountains.

In February we again commenced to plough for spring crops, while I had the happiness to behold the tender blade of my wheat and rye clothing a few acres with a beautiful green, pleasingly contrasted with the gray, wild, wormwood and other traits of our dreary solitude. (334)
While Pratt’s bitterness for those who drove the Saints from Nauvoo is evident, he is obviously determined to paint a very favorable picture of his frontier experience. This positive stance is consistent in all of the frontier endeavors he portrays in the Autobiography. Pratt writes himself not simply as a frontiersman, but as a successful one. This optimism is also one of the “distinguishing characteristics of the American people that emerged from the three-century-long process of westering, according to Turner” (Billington, America’s 11).

In his account of the second winter in the Salt Lake Valley, Pratt’s optimism continues:

Our city now began to take form and shape, and to be dotted here and there with neat little cottages, or small temporary buildings, composed of adobes or logs. The roofs were generally of poles or timbers covered with earth. Saw mills were now in operation, and a few boards were obtained for floors, doors, etc. Our happy new year passed off merrily, and we were probably as happy a people as could be found on the earth. (336)

Pratt, in painting such promising pictures of the Mòrmon frontier, seems to be filling the role of an “image maker,” as Billington called it.
Billington states, "The image makers, whether exuberant guidebook writers, land promoters, imaginative novelists, travelers, or the homespun authors of American letters, helped shape the course of history, and they deserve a larger place in its annals than they have been accorded" (America's 96-97). Pratt's autobiography is significant because it adds fuel to the mythic fire of the greatness of the frontier.

During the early settlement of Utah, Pratt was asked several times to perform exploration missions to various regions in the Great Basin. Clearly he viewed these expeditions as equally important as his ministry in the Church because a large amount of space is devoted to the accounts of these explorations. During his first winter on the frontier in Ohio, according to the Autobiography, Pratt read "from the scriptures and a few other books," consisting of "Mckenzies's travels in the Northwest, and Lewis and Clark's tour up the Missouri and down the Columbia rivers" (10). This earlier reading of travel accounts most likely influenced his own writing and the sense of mission in his undertaking. Pratt's narrative of his travels clearly resembles the accounts of Mckenzie as well as Lewis and Clark's travels in terms of style. The scope of my thesis does not allow it, but further study of the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt in comparison to frontier travel accounts and autobiographies could prove
fruitful. Pratt’s autobiography might again be seen as a bridge, this time between American autobiographers in the northeast and those in the American frontier, who tend to be overlooked.

Of particular interest among Pratt’s travel accounts in the Autobiography is his narrative of the 1850 exploration mission “into the dreary and almost unknown regions of Southern Utah” (338). His accounts of travel and exploration along the frontier differ in one strong respect from most other travel accounts of the period. Pratt’s narrative treats the exploration as a mission for “the Lord.” Thus, the record contains moments of miraculous spiritual manifestations. For instance this account from the 1850 exploration of southern Utah:

**Saturday, 26th**--In the morning we found ourselves so completely buried in snow that no one could distinguish the place where we lay. Some one rising, began shoveling the others out. This being found too tedious a business, I raised my voice like a trumpet, and commanded them to arise; when all at once there was a shaking among the snow piles, the graves were opened, and all came forth! We called this Resurrection Camp. Passing on, we forded the Sevier, and
camped on the heights, six or seven miles north of the same, the snow this day being much less. (340)

Pratt's autobiography describes much of the Great Basin territory during this early settlement period, which makes it a valuable geographical and historical document as well as a fascinating account of explorations.

Resourcefulness is another characteristic that Turner claimed the frontier forged in the American character. In addition to his territorial exploration missions for the Church, Pratt explored on his own initiative as a means of financial support. The Autobiography records his exploration and excavation of the canyon he called Big Canyon Creek (now called Parley's Canyon) in Utah. Pratt built a road through the canyon that provided a "less rugged route than the pioneer entrance to the valley" (336). By the summer of 1850, he had opened his road to California emigration and collected tolls amounting to "one thousand five hundred dollars" (342). Certainly Pratt was a manifestation of the resourceful frontier American described by Turner.

Pratt also experienced many of the hardships the frontier offered. Upon arrival in Missouri with a group of Latter-day Saints he wrote: "We suffered the hardships incident to a new and in many places, unsettled country, such as hunger, thirst, fatigue, etc." (54). Pratt saw his first
wife suffer from many illnesses on the frontier. He watched her die just after she gave birth to their first child. Pratt himself suffered numerous diseases on the frontier (recovering each time, according to his own account, through miraculous healings), and he experienced a multitude of other frontier hardships. The frontier experience required many sacrifices such as comfort, health, and the loss of loved ones. Because Pratt was willing to sacrifice what was required of him from this life in order to earn his reward in the next, he was able to endure the trials that the frontier presented.

It is noteworthy that in Pratt's autobiography, one identifies the predominantly positive characteristics that Turner argued the frontier would produce. Pratt displays "optimism, resourcefulness, enthusiasm," but not so much "crudeness, impatience, and materialism" (Billington, America's 11). According to Turner, "frontiersmen were men of action, not contemplation. Many had no concern for learning or for books, and undoubtedly anti-intellectualism was one of the traits that these frontiersmen bestowed upon the nation" (Billington, America's 13). Pratt, unlike this stereotype, was a man of both action and contemplation. He faced the hardships of the frontier, but he also made time for intellectual
pursuits. Pratt’s autobiography carefully constructs an image of the “ideal” frontier American.

Pratt interacted with Native Americans both in his travels westward and in his missionary labors. He served on the first Mormon mission to the Native Americans or “Lamanites,” as they are called in Mormonism. In the Autobiography, Pratt portrays himself as a type of savior to the Native Americans. At the time of his first resolution to move westward, the “natives of the forest” are an important part of this frontiersman’s life. He wrote, “I will win the confidence of the red man; I will learn his language; I will tell him of Jesus; I will read to him the Scriptures; I will teach him the arts of peace; to hate war, to love his neighbor, to fear and love God, and to cultivate the earth. Such were my resolutions” (9). Pratt’s attitude toward Native Americans thus sets him apart from many frontier Americans who embraced Manifest Destiny at the expense of the natives. He exhibits the other extreme of taking on the “white man’s burden” and trying to “civilize the heathen.”

Pratt’s frontier missionary experiences, recorded in the autobiography, are also numerous. They could be viewed as important accounts of frontier preaching and frontier attitudes toward religion. Pratt gives many examples of frontier hospitality. Often he and a
companion were given food and shelter as they traveled without "purse or scrip" (or with neither money nor food) on the frontier. In Missouri, Pratt found men eager to listen at a hotel in the town of Madison. The account reads:

I placed the Book of Mormon on a public table and sat down to read a newspaper; soon the boarders came out, and one by one looked at the Book, and inquired whose it was; soon the landlord came out, who I learned was so very deaf that one could only be heard by placing mouth to ear and shouting at the very top of the voice. He caught up the Book and inquired, "Whose is this?" I arose, placed my arm round his neck, and my mouth close to his ear, and shouted, "IT IS MINE, AND I HAVE COME TO PREACH!!" This was so loud that it almost alarmed the town. He welcomed me to entertainment free of charge, had the Court House opened, the town notified, and evening found me in the judge's seat, a reporter in the clerk's desk, and a crowded audience. I had good liberty and all seemed much interested. (63)

During the intense persecution that Mormons experienced on the frontier in Missouri and Illinois, Pratt was actively involved in some of
the Church's political dealings. The detailed information in the
*Autobiography* concerning these persecutions, and the actions of both
Mormons and non-Mormons, provides greater understanding of frontier
politics and attitudes in nineteenth-century America. Pratt also displays
his involvement in the building of a frontier government in Utah. He "was
appointed by a General Convention as one of a committee of ten to draft a
constitution for the Provisional State of Deseret" (336).

The above characteristics and ways in which Pratt exemplifies
frontier culture are important because, according to Turner, the true
American was essentially the frontiersman. While Turner did not intend
the frontier hypothesis to be the only tool for understanding America, it is
one way of seeing American character. Pratt's portrayal of himself as a
frontiersman is also one additional reason why I feel he is worthy of
consideration in American autobiography. Pratt's autobiography is a
mirror of the culture of nineteenth-century frontier America. Pratt
himself forged an identity as a quintessential frontiersman. In addition to
reflecting frontier culture, Pratt's autobiography is a mirror of American
religion in the nineteenth-century. This assertion can be strengthened by
looking at another thesis—that of Harold Bloom.
Pratt and “The American Religion”

The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt clearly mirrors the culture of Mormonism, a religious tradition Bloom has labeled the American Religion.

Bloom says:

There is something of Joseph Smith's spirit in every manifestation of the American Religion. Joseph knew that he was no part of the creation, knew that what was best and oldest in him already was God. And he knew also, more humanly, that despite his prophetic vocation and communal vision, he was essentially alone, and could experience his own spiritual freedom only in prophetic solitude. (127-28)

When Bloom speaks of Mormonism, he includes Pratt with Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and Orson Pratt as critical founders. For instance, he calls Mormonism “the religion of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Parley and Orson Pratt” (96). He also says, “Nothing else in all of American history strikes me as materia poetica equal to the early Mormons, to Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Parley and Orson Pratt” (79). Thus Bloom would most likely apply his theory to Pratt where he does to Joseph Smith.
Bloom's statement about Joseph Smith reveals three fundamental principles of the American Religion. First, "what is best and oldest in us goes back well before Creation, and so is no part of the Creation"; second, "that what makes us free is knowledge, a history of facts and events, rather than a belief founded upon mere assent"; and third, "that this freedom has a solitary element in it, an element imbued by the loneliness of belated American time, and the American experience of the abyss of space" (103). Bloom also argues "What holds these principles together is the American persuasion, however muted or obscured, that we are mortal gods, destined to find ourselves again in worlds as yet undiscovered" (103). These three principles of the American religion can be found in the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt.

First, I examine the idea that what is best in us was not created. Bloom says that "The God of the American Religion is not a creator-God, because the American never was created, and so the American has a least part of the God within herself" (114). Pratt definitely portrays this belief in his autobiography. We have already mentioned the differences between Edwards's "Personal Narrative" and the Autobiography and pointed to the fact that Edwards seems self-deprecating while Pratt lacks this doubt in his personal salvation. According to Bloom's theory, this
may be because their differing beliefs about man and his relationship to
God. Pratt of course believed in his own destiny for Godhood and that his
nature was at its core god-like, while Edwards concentrated on his fallen
nature and his complete dependence upon God. Pratt wrote in his
autobiography that he learned about the eternal nature of men from Joseph
Smith. Pratt says of Joseph Smith:

It was from him that I learned the true dignity and destiny of a
son of God, clothed with an eternal priesthood, as the patriarch
and sovereign of his countless offspring. It was from him that
I learned that the highest dignity of womanhood was, to stand
as a queen and priestess to her husband, and to reign for ever
and ever as the queen mother of her numerous and still
increasing offspring. (260)

Pratt's narrative also displays Bloom's second principle of the
American Religion. The principle that knowledge makes one free and that
a mere belief in God and his ways is not sufficient. Again, one can refer
back to Edwards and to the differences between the two belief systems.
Edwards's significantly shorter account is concerned with what he
believes about God and his grace. Pratt's longer and detailed account of
what he had learned and what he knew through revelation exhibits his
emphasis on gaining knowledge, the second aspect of the American Religion.

Pratt is constantly affirming this revealed knowledge in his dialogues between himself and other preachers. A dialogue with a preacher named Mr. Peck is illustrative. In the autobiography, Mr. Peck warns that "prophecies were only designed to be read and understood after they were fulfilled" (71). Pratt then suggests the following:

We will apply this rule, and learn its workings by practical experience. The people at the time of the flood adopted this rule, all save eight souls. Mr. Peck's theology was then almost catholic. The universal world (save eight) were disposed to remain in ignorance as to the meaning of prophecy till after its fulfillment. The result was that they knew not until the flood came and swept them all away; then they could understand.

(70-71)

Pratt further emphasizes his point by disputing Mr. Peck's interpretation of various scriptures, showing Peck's reading to be absurd and then adds: "But what can we expect of a man when he comments upon the prophecies, while at the same time he contends that none can understand them until after their fulfillment" (73). Through this and other dialogues, Pratt
emphasizes the importance of revealed knowledge and the superiority of that knowledge to other types.

Finally, Bloom's third principle is that of solitude, or the idea that spiritual salvation was ultimately experienced alone, between God and man. The introductory quotation to my thesis is a good example of Pratt's coming to the realization of this principle. Pratt writes, "I am a stranger and the world knows me not" (409). This statement is reminiscent of one that Bloom refers to from Joseph Smith's address at the funeral of King Follett: “You don't know me; you never knew my heart. No man knows my history” (Smith, History 6:317). There is a definite tone of loneliness in these quotes indicating that both men saw their ultimate salvation as independent of any other human. Pratt's last poem, "My Fiftieth Year" also exudes this loneliness and solitude with the constant repetition of the word "I". Even the genre of autobiography speaks in the first-person singular and thus establishes a type of solitude and loneliness.

Bloom states of this solitude that, "As for the Mormon, he may never be alone with Jesus, but he aspires finally to govern without rivals in his own world, alone with his wife (or wives) and his varied progeny" (114). Again this perspective is displayed in Pratt's autobiography when he speaks of his wife Thankful after her death. Pratt writes:
Farewell, my dear Thankful, thou wife of my youth, and mother of my first born; the beginning of my strength--farewell. Yet a few more lingering years of sorrow, pain and toil, and I shall be with thee, and clasp thee to my bosom, and thou shalt sit down on my throne, as a queen and a priestess unto thy Lord, arrayed in white robes of dazzling splendor, and decked with precious stones and gold, while thy queen sisters shall minister before thee and thy sons and daughters innumerable shall call thee blessed, and hold thy name in everlasting remembrance. (143)

Bloom's American Religion obviously has relevance for Pratt's autobiography and shows not only how it mirrors Mormon culture, but also American culture and religion. Bloom's reading of Mormon history and doctrine is inaccurate at times and I emphasize that I do not submit wholeheartedly to his entire argument. However, Bloom's ideas do provide one theoretical base for some introductory investigations into what it means to be an American. Clearly Pratt's voice speaks beyond the boundaries of Mormondom to enrich our understanding of the experience of Americans in general.
Bloom concludes by saying, "Latter-day Saints . . . have been almost alone in apprehending the greatness of Joseph Smith. . . . Their prophet remains without honor among most of his countrymen" (111). Pratt, like Smith also remains "without honor among most of his countrymen" and even Latter-day Saints could do more to affirm the greatness of Pratt, and his autobiography. Bloom continues, "But insofar as there is an American Religion that is almost universal among us, whatever our professed beliefs, then Smith may be considered to be in many respects its unacknowledged forerunner" (111). According to Robert Paul, "Parley P. and Orson Pratt were, with the exception of Joseph Smith, the most significant of the Mormon thinkers to emerge during the early years of the Restoration." Paul says that the Pratt brothers "were both, in their own ways, central to the emergence of this essential intellectual dimension of the Mormon faith" (42). I assert that "insofar as there is an American Religion that is almost universal among us," Parley P. Pratt can be considered one of its forerunners—and his autobiography an important document for revealing the culture of this American religion.

Conclusion

The significance of autobiography as a central tool in American cultural studies was addressed in my introduction. Many scholars now
argue that "to understand the American mind in all its complexity, one must read a variety of American autobiographies" (*Autobiography: Essays* 14). The focus of this chapter was to show how Pratt’s autobiography can be used in this way, to “mirror” American culture. Springing from a very specific cultural, religious, and social context, Pratt speaks about a generalized American identity in the nineteenth century.

I return to Doherty who reminds us that, “Autobiography is not a peculiarly American literary form, but it does seem to be a form peculiarly suited to the traditional American self-image: individualistic and optimistic” (qtd. in *The American Autobiography* 95). As demonstrated in this chapter, Pratt, through his autobiography, can be portrayed as an individualistic and optimistic frontier American and a powerful voice of both the Mormon and the American religion.
Conclusion

Had Parley P. Pratt been able to conclude his autobiography himself he could probably not have chosen a more fitting conclusion than that chosen for him, the following poem:

MY FIFTIETH YEAR

I AM fifty years old: I have lived to see
Seven times seven and a Jubilee.
That period famed in the days of yore
As a grand release for the humble poor;
When the pledg’ed estate was again restor’d,
And the bondman free’d from his tyrant lord.
When man his fellow was bound to forgive,
And begin anew to think and to live...

I have wandered far, over land and sea,
To proclaim to the world its destiny--
To cry to the nations, repent and live,
And be ready the bridegroom to receive...
I have toiled with the great in freedom's cause,
And assisted to give to a State its laws.
I have lain in a dungeon, bound in chains,
And been honored in Courts where Justice reigns.
In a thousand joys, and a thousand fears
I have struggled on through my fifty years.
And now, by the law of God, I am free;
I will seek to enjoy my Jubilee.
I will hie me home, to my mountain dell,
And will say the "Christian" world--farewell!
I have served ye long--; 'twas a thankless task;
To retire in peace is all I ask. . . . (410-12)

Pratt died a martyr to the faith shortly after his fiftieth birthday. This poem was written four months before Pratt was killed, and when he wrote it, he was actually in search of a rest or "Jubilee" from his missionary labors in order to stay at home and perform his duties as a husband and father for a time. However, there is also some indication that Pratt knew his life was soon to end, and the poem's supplication for rest, even then, might have carried a double meaning which implied a literal rest from the toils of his earthly life.
Pratt's tenth wife Ann Agatha said of her husband, "His confidence in God was unbounded and he would go to Him and ask Him for what he needed, as a child would go to the father, with the same childlike simplicity. I have seen his prayers answered almost before he had finished his supplication" (qtd. in Pratt, Autobiography xxii). God literally answered the prayer of Pratt, contained in his last poem, and gave him a rest from all his cares in this world, making a poetic ending to Pratt's life and autobiography.

As quoted in the introduction to my thesis, Pratt said "every day that I work on my history, I naturally think that the word 'finis' will soon be added to the end" (410). Pratt was not the one to add the word 'finis' to his autobiography, instead it was added by John Taylor who helped publish the work. Taylor placed the word at the end of a poem which he himself had composed before Pratt's death, "A Response to P. P. Pratt's 'Fiftieth Year:"

Thou art "fifty years old"--I am glad to see
That thou now canst hope for a Jubilee.
Go rest thee, my friend, for weary and long
Thou hast faithfully striven with a wayward throng;
With a world environed with error's chain
Thou has wrestled and struggled, but not in vain.

On thy native shore and on foreign land
Thou has battled for truth with a master hand,
And their cities, and towns, and hamlets have rung
With the sound of truth, with the voice of song;
And thousands in Zion do now rejoice,
Who've read thy works or heard thy voice,
And millions have seen thy bosom swell
With celestial truths thou lov'st so well.

If a wish from a sincere friendly heart
Can to thee any comfort or joy impart;
If a fervent prayer to the God of grace
Could smooth thy path in thy onward race,
That prayer would be, may grace be given
To wend thy onward course to Heaven.
May'st thou abound in corn and wine,
And the blessings of plenty now be thine;
May thy family all be free from care,
And a husband's and father's plenty share;
May thy sun go down with glory rife,
And dying may'st thou burst into life;
And, when sleeping among the silent dead,
Have the blessings of millions on thy head;
And living with God, may'st thou be free,
And partake of and endless Jubilee.

FINIS (412-13)

These poems make an appropriate ending for Pratt’s autobiography and also provide a conclusion for my argument. Both poems review the accomplishments recorded in Pratt’s autobiography, reminding the reader of the extraordinary life it chronicles. As Christmas said, Pratt’s life “collapses any mere summary” (34). What is found in these poems and in the selections I have included from his Autobiography in the previous chapters cannot begin to reveal with any totality the image of Parley P. Pratt.

Pratt’s autobiography is an important part of all that remains of this great man. As Italo Sveveo said of his life writings, “the part which I recounted was not the most important. It was made the most important because I fixed it in words. And now what am I? Not he who lived but he who described. Oh the only important part of life is the regathering” (qtd.
in Fichtelberg xiii). Pratt’s autobiography contains what was important for him and much that is important for readers today.

In summary, my major objective in trying to “properly present” the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt has been to reveal its worthiness for consideration by scholars of American autobiography and culture who have overlooked it in the past. First, I have “properly placed” it in the appropriate context for consideration, specifically that of American autobiography, not just American literature in general. I have also suggested where Pratt’s autobiography should be placed in the canon of American autobiography--alongside works that are traditionally canonized, like those by Edwards, Franklin, and Thoreau.

Second, I have used critical studies of Edwards’, Franklin’s and Thoreau’s autobiographical writings to compare these works with Pratt’s autobiography. In this second endeavor, my goal was to help the reader “properly perceive,” or at least to understand to a greater extent the Autobiography. My own perception of the work as a whole is that it can be seen as a quest for salvation, based on Kazin’s assumption that “personal history is directly an effort to find salvation, to make one’s own history come out right” (The American 35). I have suggested that Pratt’s autobiography centers on the theme of sacrifice and that he sought eternal
salvation through sacrificing his life in service to the Lord. The comparisons made in my second chapter were also intended to help the reader "properly perceive" how well Pratt's autobiography fits in the dialogue of past and present critical work in the field of American autobiography and also perceive how comparable it is to these other great works.

Third, I have tried to "properly portray" Pratt and his autobiography as a mirror of culture. I have tried to demonstrate how Pratt reflects both nineteenth-century frontier culture as well as the culture of Bloom's American Religion. My intention in this case was to portray Pratt as a quintessential American, which I believe he was, and display how effective his autobiography can be in revealing American culture on the nineteenth-century frontier.

In conclusion, I recommend that the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt be "properly prioritized" in the canon of American autobiography and as a tool for teaching American culture. Scholars of both autobiography and American culture and teachers of Mormon history and literature will find great advantage in giving the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt higher
priority than it has received in the past. It is a work worthy to be
"properly presented" and properly perused.

FINIS
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"Properly Presented": The Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt in light of current American autobiography research, intended to assert its worthiness for greater consideration by scholars of American culture. The findings suggest that the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt is comparable to other works now included in the canon of American autobiography such as Jonathan Edward’s “Personal Narrative,” Benjamin Franklin’s Autobiography, and Henry David Thoreau’s Walden. Critical theories on the above autobiographies are applied to the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt in order to show its applicability to the current dialogue of American autobiography. Finally, the theories of Frederick Jackson Turner and Harold Bloom are applied to the Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt in order to demonstrate that Parley P. Pratt is a quintessential nineteenth-century, frontier American, and that his Autobiography can be used as a tool for greater understanding of American culture.

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