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Cover art by Jeanette Atwood
**ANOTHER VIEW OF FAITH AND DOUBT**

**BY OYD PETERSEN, IN his excellent article “Soulcraft 101: Faith, Doubt and the Process of Education” (SUNSTONE July 2009) suggests that “something damming” in Mormon conceptions of doubt and faith causes students to leave the Church. He implies that a change in these conceptions would be a good goal and that students would then be free to choose the LDS culture or community in which to worship. I am in agreement and suggest that we in the dispersed Sunstone community can help those within our local areas (like politics, all religion is local) by suggesting the following useful conceptions of faith, belief, and doubt.

**FAITH VS. BELIEF**

Faith and belief are often regarded as synonymous. Mormon scriptures often use them interchangeably. But the modern definition of belief implies a conscious intellectual acceptance of something as true or factual based on reason, experience, information, evidence, significance, or the authority of the thing’s source. The opposites of doubt are belief and lack of knowledge, not unfaithfulness or nihilism. Belief is passive—an agreement with the presented evidence.

Faith implies a conscious willingness to trust, accept, and follow. “Having faith” in the Book of Mormon, for example, implies making a bridge between what we know or believe about the book and what the book claims to be. The opposite of faith is a lack of trust and acceptance, not doubt. Faith is active—an acceptance and trust which impels us to action. Faith is a product of the heart; belief, a product of the mind.

Some confusion in using these terms came about because English has no verb form for the word “faith.” English has verbs for belief, trust, doubt, and knowledge: to believe, to trust, to doubt, to know. To express faith as action—as a verb—we must use other words: “I believe” (not the best choice but widely used) Better phrases might be, “I accept,” or “I trust,” or “I have faith in...”

Doubt, in the modern sense, means to be unsettled in belief or opinion, to be uncertain or undecided. It means not having sufficient information or evidence on which to build a belief or have knowledge.

However, older religious meanings for doubt are to distrust and to reject. These were the intended meanings when we were commanded to “doubt not.” Historically, doubt was associated with the absence of trust in God and the rejection of his existence and goodness. Little wonder that the word “doubt” still has...
such a strong negative connotation (even though doubt and questioning are thought to be highly desirable scientific and consumer skills). Less negative terms for doubt are skepticism, questioning, or wondering. “I wonder [have questions] about the historicity of the Book of Mormon” sounds less threatening to Mormon ears than “I doubt the historicity of the Book of Mormon.”

The Mormon student who experiences doubt and subsequently exercises faith invariably develops a personal religion and a personal relationship with God which may or may not be compatible with the LDS community’s expectations. The Mormon model works for some, but in recent times, other models appear to be more attractive for many. While Church leaders wrestle with this problem on a global scale, we of the Sunstone community can again positively influence the application of faith in the individual hearts and minds of struggling members in our families, classes, and wards.

Much more on these important topics can be found in Chapter 2 of my book, For Those Who Wonder, the latest version of which can be downloaded free from my website: www.forthosewhowonder.com.

D. JEFF BURTON
Bountiful, Utah

INTELLECTUAL SELF-RELIANCE


Petersen mourns that in Mormon culture, religious questioning and skepticism are frequently met with judgmental disapproval. Then he posits welcome ideas on how those experiencing religious doubt can use intellectual self-reliance to find answers and solace. I particularly enjoyed his admonition, “We should not be afraid of the truth,” and the suggestion to seek more information rather than less, when confronted with religious doubts.

Early on, Petersen quotes an anonymous returned missionary “who had grown up in a very devout family” and later “found out … Joseph Smith had several wives while he was alive.” The returned missionary indignantly continues, “I was never told that in church, seminary, my mission” and wonders “why the Church sometimes goes out of its way to not talk about some things.” Seeing the complaint caused me to reflect on my own experience with discovering problems in Mormon history and on the importance of developing, as Petersen infers, intellectual self-reliance.

Despite being raised in a devout family and graduating from seminary, I entered the mission field at age 19 with no functional knowledge of Mormon history, doctrine, or scripture. But I didn’t blame my ignorance on the Church. To the contrary, I considered ignorance my own fault because I had been a distracted teenager. To my astonishment, and to the astonishment of my high school friends, the mission experience thankfully developed for me a deep personal faith, a passion for gospel research, and an addiction to collecting Mormon books.

After I returned home, my spiritual curiosity led to a long-term avocation with Mormon history as well as exposure to interesting perspectives on controversial topics during BYU Education Weeks, Sunstone Symposia, MHA annual conferences, Orem Institute classes, and BYU-Provo religion classes. These resources provided me with enough self-reliant capacity to grapple with facts, context, and opinions to form my own conclusions on prickly areas in Mormon history.

The returned missionary’s expectation that the Church is responsible to teach and explain every historical wart or religious paradox in Sunday worship services, seminary classes, or the mission field is unrealistic. Church leaders will not and need not turn worship services into forums where historical controversies and theological discrepancies are explored and debated. In today’s information age, debates on these hot-button topics can be effortlessly located on the Internet. Additionally, Church historians and BYU professors have recently published landmark studies with academic presses on controversial topics including the Mark Hoffman imbroglio, the Mountain Meadows massacre, polygamy, and Joseph Smith.

I understand the surprise some long-time Church members feel when they discover problems in Church history. However, I deplore the attitude of some who blame the Church and its leaders for their own previous intellectual incuriosity. I commend Petersen for his thoughtful efforts to encourage intellectual self-reliance among Church members.

MIKE PAULOS
San Antonio, Texas

HONEST JON

by Jonathan David Clark

I’ll be brief... in Kolob time...
In the Beginning . . .

THERE WAS A HOTEL, AND IT WAS WITHOUT FORM, AND VOID . . .

AND MARY ELLEN SAID, LET THERE BE A SYMPOSIUM!

AND LO, THE FAITHFUL DID GATHER

TO CONVERSE ONE WITH ANOTHER . . .

TO BREAK BREAD . . .

(YEA, EVEN THE BEASTS OF THE FIELD DID ATTEND)

. . . AND TO RENEW OLD TIES.

AND THEY SAW THAT IT WAS GOOD.

SLC Sunstone Symposium 2009
081. Smith-Pettit Lecture. The Achievements and Ironies of Women's Religious Creativity
Mary Farrell Bednarowski


111. “Raked”: Feminist Creative Nonfiction and the Evolution of Consciousness, LDS Feminist and Otherwise
Julie J. Nichols, Whitney Nelson

112. Session Cancelled

113. Let the Woman Learn in Silence with All Subjection...—Really? A Lingering Look at a Troubling Text
Bill Heersink

114. No Recording Available

121. In Emma's Shoes: Understanding Emma's Responses to Trials and Loss
Richard Delewski

122. The Spiritual Director is In

123. The Scandal in the Practice: Joseph Smith as Religious Performer
Trevor Luke

124. Sex and the Heavenly Mother: Human Implications of Divine Emissaries
Maggie T. Toscano

131. Panel. Is Priesthood Necessary for Woman to Have Full Equality in the LDS Church? Janice Allred, Margaret M. Toscano, Sonja Farnsworth, Taryn Nelson Seawright

132. Panel. Mormons and Mediums: LDS Women's Pursuit of Mediated and Non-Mediated Communication with the Dead
Carolyn Campbell, Deloris Beynon, Laura L. Bush, Doe Daughtrey, Pepper Gregory

133. Panel. Possibilities in Mormon Feminism
Stephanie Snyder, Aaron talor, Kathryn Taylor, Sheila Taylor

Kimberly Mellen, Rachel Leavitt, Alyssa Cole, Adrienne Castello-Martin, Becky McInnis, Vancel Mellen


152. Repeating History: Comparing the 193 and 2008 Raids on FLDS Ken Driggs

153. No Recording Available

154. Immersed in All Things Mormon—Except the Font
Jeffrey Needle

Steve Warren

162. Is Heavenly Mother a Member of the Godhead? [Partial]. Janice Allred

163. Study Aids for Bible Lovers
William J. (Jack) Worlton

164. A Prodigy for Women: Comparing Church History of the Blacks and the Priesthood to Priesthood Authority for Women
Melanny Cowley

171. Panel. Author Meets Critics: Nauvoo

209. Twenty-Five Years Since the Revelation on Women
William D. Russell, Karen Maguerite Moloney, Bill Heersink, Claudia L. Bushman, Donald Q. Cannon, Jake Zollinger, Charles Randall Paul, Robert A. Rees, Bill Bradshaw, Gordon Madsen

213. Panel. Author Meets Critics: Nauvoo

215. Church Historical Sites and the Construction of Testimony
Barr Laga

216. No Recording Available

217. No Recording Available

221. No Recording Available

224. Violent Grammar of the Atonement

231. Panel. Supporting Special Needs Children

232. Power to the Purple: The Poetry of Mary Bradford and Friends [Partial]

233. Panel. Supporting Special Needs Children and Young Adults in the Church [Partial]

234. Panel. Divine Malfeasance [Partial]

235. Twenty-Five Years Since the Revelation on Women
William D. Russell, Karen Maguerite Moloney, Bill Heersink, Claudia L. Bushman, Donald Q. Cannon, Jake Zollinger, Charles Randall Paul, Robert A. Rees, Bill Bradshaw, Gordon Madsen
DEVOOTIONAL

“HOPE IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS”

By Frances Lee Menlove

THIS MORNING WE ARE GOING to be searching for wellsprings of hope—what the poet Emily Dickenson calls “the thing with feathers that perches in the soul.”

Simply getting up each morning, finding our way to the kitchen, stepping outside: all these take hope. Planning for the future and trying to make things better: these are based in hope. We may not keep checking to see if hope is there, but we certainly know when it is not there. We have all experienced that “What’s the use; why bother?” feeling. We know how hopelessness feels, how bleak the world, how drained our souls.

We need hope as our companion as we try to navigate through these grim times. We are in the midst of two wars, the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, and a planet in peril. In my small county in Oregon, we have more than four hundred homeless children. Can we get control of violence before we destroy ourselves? Can we take care of the planet before we destroy it? Can we re-imagine human flourishing? Hope is a virtue that, at least in my life lately, needs shoring up. Hope keeps the future open.

We have all had those moments, sacred moments, when hope breaks through and fear disappears. Those brief moments of silence. Something happens when the sacred erupts into our lives, when we encounter the world through awe and wonder. The catch of breath, the inner smile, the pause before opening a book or placing the dinner plates on the table, or in the few seconds between when a child asks you a riddle and tells you the answer. “Grandma, do you know the difference between ‘here’ and ‘there’? (pause) The ‘t.” Hope is revived, and fear is gone.

Something happens. A message arrives. It says that you can change, that together everyone can change; we can solve our problems, and life can get better.

In fact, when Harvard chaplain Peter Gomes was asked for his definition of the Good News, he stated without hesitation, “You don’t have to be as you are.” We don’t have to be as we are. We can change. That is exceedingly good news. It cheers us on as we try to keep our New Year’s resolution to exercise more, as we look for ways to take better care of our planet, as we work for peace and justice.

We don’t have to be trapped in our fear, we don’t have to let our histories define us. We can chart a new course for ourselves and our communities. That is the Good News. And if you think about it, not surprising. The foundation of Christianity is change and personal transformation. Repentance is about change. Forgiveness is about change.

Bishop John Shelby Spong finds hope in what he calls the seventeen most boring verses in the Bible. A few of them read, “Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren; and Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; and Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon,” and on and on for another thirteen verses (Matthew 1:2-4). This is the genealogy of Jesus at the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew—all the “begats.” All the verses we skip when reading the birth story.

The line that produced Jesus runs through the incest of Tamar, the prostitution of Rahab, the seduction of Ruth, and the adultery of Bathsheba. This is the genealogy of Jesus, an inglorious litany—the jarring way Matthew chose to introduce Jesus to us. What is he trying to tell us? That God can bring holiness out of any human distortion. God can work through any human weakness. Jesus came into being through human frailties, through a dysfunctional family history.

Christ’s birth shows us that the world does not have to be as it is; that we can set ourselves and our communities on a new course. We do not have to be trapped by our histories or our fears. We can change.

WE ALL KNOW that the universe is not made of atoms; it is made of stories. Stories surround us and shape us. Stories are the building blocks of our lives. So, I want to tell a story about hope—a true story; a Gene England story.

I was attending the London Theatre Study Abroad Program led by Gene England and Tim Slover in the spring of 1998 when I heard about a fireside in the London Hyde Park Ward. At 6:30 p.m. on 7 June, I was in my seat waiting. The subject of the fireside was blacks and the Church. It was chosen because of distress among many of the black converts in that ward. They had listened to the missionary lessons, been converted and baptized only to find out months (and for some of them years) later about the history of the Church’s ban on blacks in the priesthood, often accompanied by those dismaying and painful theological rationales for the ban. One black member described his torments after a seldom-seen relative said to him upon hearing that he had become a Mormon, “You did what? How could you have joined that racist church?”

Because of this twitchiness in the ward, Gene was asked to give a fireside. I wouldn’t know how to cope with such an assignment, but Gene coped. He more than coped.

Gene talked candidly about racism in society, in the Church, and in himself. He spoke of his own joy when the ban on blacks in the priesthood was lifted. He spoke movingly of the need to both own and absorb our whole church history if we are to learn from it. We can’t disown whatever is embarrassing or whatever we don’t approve of in that history. The memory of the past is required for learning, for moral instruction.

That evening, Gene took ownership of not just the glories of the Church, but its shadows. He didn’t speak from a distance, but from the center of the story. He spoke with grace and dignity. He listened carefully as several black members told stories of being blindsided by a history they didn’t know before joining.

My memory is that when he was asked about some of the theological underpinnings of the ban on the priesthood (e.g., blacks were less valiant in the war in heaven, or descendents of Cain), he gave them short shrift.

FRANCES LEE MENLOVE, one of the founders of Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, holds a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Michigan and a Master’s of Divinity from the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. She has four children, six grandchildren, and lives in Oregon. This sermon was given as a devotional address at the 2009 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium (CD or download #SL09301).
Where can we find hope? In the very essence of the gospel, the Good News that we don’t have to be as we are. In the checkered genealogy of Jesus—the future can break from the past. In the story Gene England tells of his own and the Church’s transformation from past racism. From that story, I find hope that we can move to equal rights and equal caring for gays.

I will end with a final and perhaps unlikely source of hope. Poetry. It can touch souls, but can it save the earth? That question, “Can Poetry Save the Earth?” is the title of a book by Stanford professor John Felstiner, who asks, “If poems touch our full humanness, can they quicken awareness and bolster respect for this ravaged, resilient earth we live in?” He presents poetry from dozens of English and American writers who have spoken passionately to—and for—the natural world.

During an interview on NPR, Felstiner was issued a challenge to pick just one poem that, if everyone were to read it, could save the world. He accepted the challenge and chose “The Well Rising” by William Stafford. Listen.

The well rising without sound,
the spring on a hillside,
the plowshare brimming
through the deep ground
everywhere in the field—

The sharp swallows in their swerve
flaring and hesitating
hunting for the final curve
coming closer and closer—

The swallow heart from wing beat to wing beat
counseling decision, decision:
thunderous examples. I place my feet with care in such a world.

“I place my feet with care in such a world.” Wow!

Once there was a very wise man. Upon hearing that the end of the world was near, he went to his garden and planted a tree.

Gracious God: We ask you to bless us with hope. Hope to keep the future open in our rapidly changing and often unstable world. Hope, and enough courage and resolve to accept our moral responsibility to make a difference. Help us to plant our feet with care in this world which you pronounced good. Help us to run and not be weary. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.
Outside, looking in

SAINTS IN THE SUBURBS

The following article comes from John Elsegood, a freelance journalist and teacher of history and politics at Carmel Adventist College in Perth, Western Australia.

How many people would apply for a job with the following description?

Wanted:
Young men and women for overseas work for two years. Must be committed to work six days a week between 10 a.m. and 9 p.m. Pay is nothing and applicants must meet their own expenses. Social life is restricted—no girlfriends, boyfriends, or partying allowed. You can also expect to be abused and meet irate people from time to time.

Such is the lot of young missionaries who serve The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Perth, Western Australia.

Some 100 missionaries, mainly young men with some young women and couples, are under the direction of Mission President Carl Maurer—and, like them, he receives no pay for his work. In fact, as a Queenslander, he had to journey to the other side of the continent to take up the post.

"Their lives change during missionary service," Maurer says. "At the start, they are keen—but like a deer in the headlights. Over time they make changes in themselves as there is a deeper spiritual development in thinking about others rather than just themselves. Very few of them fail because their cultural background ensures a high success rate, but there are always going to be homesickness and separation anxieties."

Like his missionaries, President Maurer puts in long days. On one occasion, I contacted him at about 8:15 p.m. as he was returning from the airport, some new missionary arrivals in tow.

I took the time to speak to four young representatives of the Church: Elders Casper, Anderson, Trowbridge, and Tilley.

Ryan Casper is a decent, astute, and likeable person who described his home culture as similar to Western Australia—laid back. He and his last partner, Elder Trevor Trowbridge, hail from Utah, so I immediately dubbed them U1 and U2, after the two famous cartoon characters of Bananas in Pyjamas, B1 and B2.

When I asked him whether he got called "Casper the Friendly Ghost," he said that on such occasions, he identified himself rather as "Casper of the Holy Ghost."

His observations on Australians in general: "I think Aussies are less inclined to talk about spiritual matters. They are more likely to engage in social 'pub talk.'" Casper meant it not as a criticism but as an observation. An accurate one, I would say. He also commented on the many drive-in bottle shops, something missing from the Utah scene.

Elder Casper, being a keen basketball player, fully embraced Australian culture by trying his hand at cricket and Australian Rules football.

The lowlight of his stay was a nasty fall he took on his bike, losing him a front tooth and gaining him a few facial abrasions. Speaking of abrasiveness, he also remembers being subjected to a verbal attack by a Baptist minister who accused him and his partner of worshipping idols and practicing polygamy! That behavior, from someone who should know better, is un-Australian.

But courage in difficult situations is something a missionary needs. Last year, two Australian LDS missionaries working Nollamara, in Perth’s northern suburbs, spotted a pregnant African woman being repeatedly stabbed by her husband. Elders Zane Beard and Phil Bennallack coaxed the irate man away from the woman. An off-duty police officer who arrived on the scene hailed the two as heroes and lifesavers. Not your average day at the office!

Fortunately, the Australian mission field is not always so action-packed, and Elder Casper’s relaxed style has helped him appreciate Australian humor and even some of the more colorful expressions of his host country. Hopefully he can learn to forget them! His partner, Elder Trevor Trowbridge, astutely observes, “There is no such thing as swear words in Australia. It’s normal.”

Trowbridge, who ended his mission in July 2009, loves Perth like a second home. He says he particularly enjoyed serving in the isolated northwest of Western Australia, a geographic area still possessing the pioneer spirit that comes with small towns and vast open spaces—perhaps in the spirit of a bygone Utah. Western Australia occupies one third of the Australian continent, which is comparable to the U.S. in size. However, despite the vastness of the territory, WA’s population resembles that of Utah or New Mexico in size.
An earnest young man who lived in Ephraim, Utah (pop: 5000), Elder Trowbridge was a natural fit for the isolated Pilbara–Kimberley region, one of the last frontiers. Trevor says he loves the ‘red-dirt area’ and the hands-on role he can play with the local congregation.

Trowbridge admits to low points in his mission, caused by homesickness and discouragement on the days no one wants to listen to his message. Such times, he says, are when a person most needs to pray, particularly when so far from home. “The Lord gives us weaknesses so that we may humble ourselves to turn that weakness into strength,” he said, paraphrasing from Ether 12:27.

Elder Jesse Anderson, a cattle rancher from Alberta, Canada, says he was initially surprised at just how multicultural Australia is, and the amount of spirituality there, despite Australia’s having a reputation as a tough mission field. Coming from Athabasca (pop: 5000), he feels at home in the Avon Valley at Northam (pop: 7000), a wheat and sheep area only 60 miles from Perth.

“I love the place,” he says.

An upbeat character, Elder Anderson says he has had no down periods in Australia. His only disappointments come when a person seems to accept the message but owing to other pressures, doesn’t follow through. When asked if he would consider himself successful if such a person later made a religious commitment but to another church, he said he would regard that as better than making no commitment at all.

Elder Brad Tilley, whose father had served his own LDS mission in Australia, was also amazed at the diversity of the country and people. “I didn’t expect Perth to be so built up, even though I knew it was not just a place of Akubras (hats) and boomerangs.” He has spent much of his mission in Broome, a pearling and tourism center strongly influenced by Chinese and Aboriginal culture.

For Elder Tilley, the high point of a mission is when “you see the change in people when they accept Christ—the rush of the Spirit working.”

The esprit de corps of the missionaries is obvious. According to an Australian missionary, Phil Baker, who served in the U.S.A. forty years ago, that spirit is something one really misses when the service is ended. He says that ending a mission can be hard. “It takes some adjustment after two years of disciplined and structured service. I would often unconsciously look around for my companion before realizing that I was back in regular life. Hardly a week goes by that I don’t recall an uplifting experience or lesson that I learned during that time of life learning. The Lord has blessed me a hundredfold for any sacrifice I may have made.”

As God’s promise of 1 Samuel 2:30 makes clear: “Those that honor me I will honor.”—and that will include his four faithful servants whom this writer was briefly privileged to meet.

A place for every truth

BEASTLY REFLECTIONS

This regular Cornucopia column features incidents from and glimpses into the life and ministry of Elder James E. Talmage as compiled by James P. Harris, who is currently working on a full-length biography of this fascinating Mormon apostle. The column title is adapted from the statement inscribed on Elder Talmage’s tombstone: “Within the Gospel of Jesus Christ there is room and place for every truth thus far learned by man or yet to be made known.”

A young man, and later as an apostle, James E. Talmage sometimes privately speculated about “the mark of the beast” and “secret combinations.”

A 28-year-old Talmage wrote an interesting entry on 24 September 1890 after he had “attended the regular monthly meeting of the Home Missionary Quorum.” The group was discussing issues regarding labor unions and a recent strike by the streetcar workers. According to
Talmage, nearly 150 men refused to work because they did not want to clean the machinery at the end of the work day. He then writes, “Several brethren reported some startling facts. It was shown that many Latter-day Saints are among the ‘Union’ members in various branches of the Federated Trade’s Associations; these men place themselves at the mercy and under the direction of men who are their avowed haters and enemies in religious and political matters. A rule of the Associations forbids any Union man to work with a non-union laborer on penalty of heavy fine; in some cases elders in the Church had refused to labor with other elders who were perhaps in destitute circumstances, but who had not identified themselves with the unions. Another rule makes it a serious offense for a Union mechanic to give instruction to any person—even his own son or his brother, until the apprentice has taken the novitiate degree in the Union order.”

Talmage reports that after the meeting, he had “a conversation with Elder Don Carlos Young . . . he being [a Salt Lake] Temple Architect.” He heard from him “that some of the brethren had been ordered by the Union officers to cease work on the Temple, ‘til certain conditions were complied with. Has it come to this! That the building of temples is to be controlled by profane unbelievers? Union organizations are assuming gigantic proportions: their existence will give use to many complicated problems in social life. Is this the ‘mark of the beast’ without which it is soon to be impossible for men either to buy or sell? The power of concerted action is great; the ‘striking’ of men in a body may prove of detriment; it is a powerful weapon in their hands, but they seem to use it so carelessly; to unsheathe and brandish it for so slight a cause.”

Thirty-three years later, after he’d been serving in the Quorum of the Twelve for more than 11 years, Talmage wrote in his journal regarding Ku Klux Klan activities. On 13 January 1923, he wrote, “In many parts of the country investigations and trials are in progress as relating to the pernicious activities of the so-called Ku Klux Klan. Today’s dispatches bring word of further outrages charged to that organization in Texas. This ‘klan’ is one of the secret combinations characteristic of the age, foretold by the prophets, and denounced by the Lord.”

**Scripture notes**

**WHO WANTS TO BE A GOD, ANYWAY?**

Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them.

Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them.

*D&C 132:20*

**WHERE IS THE APPEAL IN BECOMING A GOD?**

I am well aware of my lack of qualifications, of course, but even if I were qualified—well, I don’t even want to be a bishop, so why would I want to become a god? I imagine that most active Mormons fantasize about godhood once in a while. One acquaintance told me that in his world, he would deliberately orchestrate encounters between unlikely people who would alter each other’s world view. Perhaps, but how would he keep the unlikely people from fighting with or even killing each other?

We have at least one lament from God on this very subject, in Moses 7:33: “And unto thy brethren have I said and given commandment, that they should love one another, and that they should choose me, their Father; but behold, they are without affection, and they hate their own blood.” It seems to me that you would need a fairly large ego to think that you could get results any different from Gods.

For a very similar reason, I don’t to be a bishop. When you consider it, the callings are not all that different, except, of course, in scale. God is responsible for the world (or the universe), and a bishop is responsible for a ward. A bishop’s power extends as far as
people in the ward are willing to do what he asks; God's power, while generally defined as infinite, seems limited also. Both limitations are largely due to the principle of agency. You might think it would be fun to toss around thunderbolts or the occasional calling to the Primary, but you can't really order people around whether you are a bishop or a god.

Another thing that a bishop and God have in common is that both get to hear people's problems—lots of them—but without really being able to do much except listen. Several close friends of mine have been bishops. One would come home late on Sunday afternoons after a long day of listening to all the problems in his ward, collapse on the couch, and gasp to his wife, “I’m so glad we’re normal.” Of course, listening is a great gift, but it may not be what you thought you were going to do for eternity: hearing the complaints of a lot of unhappy people about their situations and what you, as God, should be doing to improve them.

We don’t discuss the topic of becoming a god in church as much now as we did thirty years ago, when President Spencer W. Kimball would sometimes refer to it, but it still comes up in my high priests group occasionally. Just a few Sundays ago, the teacher referred enthusiastically to the “millions” of our potential progeny. The thought of millions more children made me feel tired, perhaps because I was thinking of my wife and our own very small batch of progeny (most of whom have left home). I raised my hand and asked, “Do you think there’s a place in heaven for empty nesters? I mean, can’t we be in heaven without having millions more children? Couldn’t our children just have the millions of progeny, if they want to, and then we could enjoy them as godly grandparents?”

There is one scripture that makes me particularly reluctant to take on the responsibilities of godhood; it is also very telling about the nature of God. In Matthew 10:29, Jesus is assuring his followers that to God, they’re of more worth than many sparrows: “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.” I don’t have any problem with assuring people of their value to God, but the thought of having to watch each of those millions of birds die every day without saving any is a little more than I can handle. Of course, it isn’t just the sparrows—it’s the young mothers with cancer, the fathers caught in crippling accidents, the premature passings of children who have lived too little in this life, repeated daily by the millions around the world.

It’s that awesome responsibility to watch and listen over the whole earth but not to intervene that mystifies me. Those who desire to be lords of their own creation should consider the experience of Enoch, when he saw the Lord lament over the creation of man in Moses 7:29: “And Enoch said unto the Lord: How is it that thou canst weep, seeing thou art holy, and from all eternity to all eternity?” Here is God, timeless and powerful, but still suffering because of His creations. God’s love for creation and every creature is very evident to me, but what kind of love omits any intervention?

Perhaps the kind that brings a Godly sorrow, but that is beyond my desire and comprehension. But He still watches every sparrow fall.

MICHAEL VINSON
Star Valley, Wyoming

Of good report

LET IT BEGIN WITH ME

In August and September 2009, the Oakland California Stake Presidency sponsored a series of meetings meant to foster a better understanding of the challenges faced by gays and lesbians in the Church. In each presentation, a member of the stake impacted by this issue was asked to share his or her experiences. The following was presented by Mitch Mayne in the Oakland, California First Ward.

YOU KNOW WHO I AM. YOU HAVE SAT NEXT TO me in meetings. You have greeted me with warmth when I’ve come to church. You have heard me blend my voice with yours in song. You have heard my voice in prayer.

Yet I wonder how many of you would treat me less kindly if you knew the truth of who I really am—a gay Latter-day Saint. I wonder if you would judge me—however mildly, however inadvertently, however silently.

Being honest about who I am has seldom led to a positive outcome. In my home, my father told me that my being gay was his ultimate fear and my ultimate failure. My mother told me it would have been better for her if I’d been born dead than gay. Growing up, I was scorned on the playground, ridiculed and bullied in the classroom. I have been fired from jobs because I am gay. I was once told by a Church leader that because I am gay, I am unworthy of ever taking the sacrament. I have been told that I will never work with the youth of the Church. I have been told in meetings that it is because of people like me that the AIDS pandemic has come upon the earth—that my sins are bringing punishment upon the wicked and the sinless alike.

It has not been an easy path, nor a path I would wish for anyone. But it is my path. And it has made me who I am today. I am, in fact, grateful for being gay. It has given me levels of compassion, understanding, patience, and forgiveness that I would never have developed otherwise.

Many Sundays, I look out at you across the congregation: young families, with your brood of wonderful and rambunctious children; midlife couples with your fledgling adult children, offering them support as they leave the nest; husbands and wives who’ve shared this earthly path together for years, with your memories of lifelong love and companionship. And I know I will never have those things. If I am to live by Church doctrine, I am relegated to a life of solitude, and my sentence is to grow old and leave this world alone.

Those are painful realizations for me. Yet when the
sacrament is passed, when I bow my head and speak my sorrow to my Heavenly Father, something grand happens. Almost without exception, a feeling washes over me from deep inside my soul. A tender, warm, yet powerful feeling—and an unmistakable voice that tells me, “You belong here.” I belong—not when I have it all figured out, not if I can become straight, not when I know all the answers—but today, right here, right now. With you. That, my dear brothers and sisters, is why I am Mormon. Because I belong here.

Being a child of my Heavenly Father was not a choice. Being gay is not a choice. Both simply are. Both are intertwined into the DNA of my soul so deeply that you could not extricate one from the other without destroying who I am. They are, in fact, who I am.

Why do I speak to you today?
I don’t want pity. To pity me is to make me a victim. I want understanding. To understand me is to love me as an equal.
I don’t want tolerance. If I am tolerated, I am disliked or feared in some way. I want respect as a fellow striving child of God—an equal in His eyes.
I don’t want acceptance. To accept me is to grudgingly grant me the favor of your company. To accept me is to marginalize me with the assumption that I am less than you. I am your peer. I am neither above you nor below you.
I don’t want judgment. My path may be different than yours, but it is a plan built for me by a power greater than any of us in this room. To judge me is to judge the designer of that path.
I don’t want to be labeled as “afflicted” or “suffering” or “struggling.” I do not have an illness that requires my soul to be mended. I want to be recognized, like you, as a whole person, just as my Heavenly Father made me. I have suffered no affliction by His hand; I have, however, suffered affliction at the hands of others, including my brothers and sisters in the gospel.
I do not want to be viewed as a mistake. My path on this earth was prescribed uniquely for me, just as yours was for you. It was designed to give me the experiences I need to grow as a child of my Heavenly Father. To view me as a mistake is to view Him as a maker of mistakes.
On a cosmetic level, we are very different, you and I. You have spouses, or the opportunity for spouses; I do not. You have children, or the opportunity for children; I do not. You are attracted to those of the opposite gender; I am attracted to those of my same gender.
What I want most of all is for you to look past the superficial and the cosmetic. I want you to look at what makes us the same: the simple fact that we are all children of our Heavenly Father, and we are striving day to day to understand how best to do His will and how to return to Him. It is that simple sameness, brothers and sisters, that weighs more than all the differences in His universe.
You know who I am. You have sat next to me in meetings. You have greeted me with warmth when I’ve come to Church. You have heard me blend my voice with yours in song. You have heard my voice in prayer. And now you have heard my truth.

IN THE BOOK OF BEATITUDES
MY MOTHER FINDS HER FREEDOM AGAIN

speaks in the drunken retinol of hope
where every lost hour
the avalanche of happiness frames you
wheelbarrows of apples
invade the yard
melons big
as football stadiums
pattypan squash
to feed the nation
we arrive in slippered feet
grow young
on the sun’s delirium
elbow our way
into every corner of garden
til nothing is sinister or forgotten
and each path holds to its original decency.
In the Book of Beatitudes
my mother marvels
at the pallor
turned newborn splendor
the bleached white significance
with which we shine.

—TONI THOMAS
Sunstone Promotions LTD. Presents

A Battle Royale

Boxing

SENSATIONAL MAIN EVENTS

JACK DEMPSEY
BATTLES FOR HIS TITLE

JACK MORMON
BATTLES FOR HIS FAITH

DON'T MISS THE BRUTAL ACTION! GET YOUR TICKETS NOW!
YOU DON’T KNOW JACK

By E. George Goold

LIKE MANY THINGS HISTORICALLY MORMON, the origin and meaning of the term “Jack Mormon” are hard to explain. The first published use of the moniker came in 1846, but it was probably used earlier, circa 1834, during the Kirtland period, when Democrats in Jackson County, Missouri, were referred to as Jack Mormons. Originally, a Jack Mormon was not a baptized member of the Church but was sympathetic to its members and causes. The definition of a Jack Mormon changed over time, taking on historical, cultural, and religious meanings that only further muddy the contextual water. I guess there’s a pretty easy definition, one most active members these days seem to favor: a Jack Mormon is a (usually baptized) Mormon who knows the commandments but doesn’t follow them. That description would make Jack Mormons one of the few groups of people who are actually going to hell.

That’s me: Jack Mormon. I am Jack. Jack is me. Destination: outer darkness.

It’s easy for active members to identify Jack Mormons. Jacks don’t go to church every week. Some don’t go at all. They are likely to swear. They are likely to enjoy a beer or bet on football games or break the law of chastity. Jack’s sins are obvious.

Those far more obedient Mormons who go to church every week and hate their neighbors are safe, unidentifiable. The ones who cheat on their taxes and are dishonest in their business dealings don’t have to worry as long as they hate people who swear or drink or have premarital sex. They are not Jack Mormons, they reason, as long as they have the decency to keep their sins secret.

Maybe that’s the one distinction identifying Jack Mormons more than any other: they wear their sin the way good Mormons wear white shirts and black ties.

I am Jack’s flabbergasted sense of hypocrisy.

JACK DEMPSEY WAS born in Manassa, Colorado, 24 June 1895. Before he became the brawler and world-champion heavyweight boxer known as the Manassa Mauler, he was born the ninth of eleven children in a Mormon family. His parents, Hyrum and Celia Smoot Dempsey, had been converted by a missionary in West Virginia before they moved to Colorado. Hyrum strayed from the Church and eventually divorced Jack’s mother, but Celia was devout all her life and eventually moved to Salt Lake City. Like the striping warriors, Jack was a momma’s boy. He said of Celia, “My mother was the most magnificent woman I ever met. I knew from the time I could walk that she deserved a better break. And I swore or vowed or prayed, or whatever it is a kid does, that I would some day make it up to her.”

I am Jack’s fiercely felt loyalty to his mother.

THERE ISN’T A single day that Jack doesn’t think about the Church. There isn’t a day passes that he doesn’t think about what it means to be Mormon. He obsesses about it. He searches his soul about it. Jack has a testimony. Make no mistake. He is a believer. Jack’s testimony is built upon the traditions of his fathers, the doggedness of his mother, the trust of his siblings, the loyalty of his friends. It is built upon words like duty, dignity, grace, family, accountability, and obligation.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks said that for most people, gaining a testimony is not an event but a process. For Jack, the process is taking a bit longer than usual.

When Jack goes to the Paonia Ward in Paonia, Colorado, on an unseasonably warm day in February, it is like going back to the many church buildings throughout the land that he’d tried to attend in his past lives. He went to Institutes of Religion in Boulder, Colorado; in Manhattan, Kansas; and in Fairbanks, Alaska. He partook of the sacrament in Colorado, Alaska, and South Carolina wards. Jack travels far and wide and always looks for the same home. And is disappointed each time he doesn’t find...
it. They say that the Church is the same wherever you go. From life experience, Jack knows that sameness is simply not true.

He likes to think that this time it will be different because of the sheer beauty of this place. Of all the stops on his 35-year journey, Paonia seems like the one that is most likely to foster a rebirth. During winter evenings, when the sun hangs on the edge of the horizon and the atmosphere bends its rays at just the right angle, the light changes from white to red. It turns the snow on the slopes of Mount Lamborn into blood that streams through the pine trees and down into the North Fork Valley.

I am Jack's certain knowledge that God is here.

JACK SITS IN the back of the chapel during sacrament meeting. He sits on the edge of the second row of folding chairs set up behind the pews. He is ambivalent, wanting people to come up and talk to him but fearing that he would then have to talk back.

He cradles the same set of scriptures he was given at age 12 when he became a deacon. His father wrote inside the cover page, “We wanted to give you a book that we sincerely hope you will use for the rest of your life. With all your reading, if you will read this book just a little each day, you will read it several times and learn lessons about life, church, and good values that are not found anywhere else. If you will apply these lessons in your life, you will be very happy with yourself, and you will achieve anything that you are willing to work for.”

These words mean a great deal to Jack. He goes back to them repeatedly. Words have a cadence, a rhythm, and a poetry whether they are spoken, sung, or written. Words create music, and words form the Articles of Faith. Words make prayers sing, and words make blessings real. Jack knows that by his works, by his words, he will be judged.

I am Jack's language of life.

JACK DEMPSEY GREW up hard and left home at age 16. Work was scarce in the West, so he ended up becoming a hobo, hopping trains and going from town to town in Nevada, Utah, and Colorado. He toured the bars of tough mining towns, challenging all takers to fights. Other men bet on the matches, and Jack collected a piece of the action. Kid Blackie, as he called himself then, was blessed with iron fists and the feet of a dancer. His punches were fast and hard, his will indomitable, and his mean streak unmatched.

Dempsey's professional career took off when he enlisted manager Jack Kearns and the cowboy promoter, Tex Rickard. The trio would usher in the Golden Age of boxing. On 4 July 1919, Dempsey captured the world heavyweight championship after bludgeoning Jess Willard in three rounds at Toledo, Ohio. Kearns bet Dempsey's stake that he would knock Willard out in the first round, and Dempsey did his best to comply. He sent the defending champ to the mat seven times in the first, his fury busting open Willard's face and leaving him glassy-eyed and stupid. Somehow Willard survived till the third round, when Dempsey's savage beating finally forced his submission. Jack went from being Kid Blackie to the Manassa Mauler to the Champ.

I am Jack's quest for eternal progression.

THERE'S A WORD Jack thinks about a lot when he's at church: guilt. Guilt is a presence that accompanies him. Guilt lingers behind a curtain in his heart, waiting for just the precise moment to stab. Jack feels guilt for committing sins he doesn't even believe in. Worse than guilt is the terrible shame he feels when he commits the sins he does believe in. The deepest damage lasts the longest.

Jack knows the words of his patriarchal blessing. He recites them in his mind: “You are of a royal heritage. Always remember who you are. Never do anything in your life that
would in any way give anyone the impression that you do not live the teachings you profess to believe in."

Jack feels shame, searing shame, every time he recalls the words. When he goes unnoticed to priesthood meetings at Paonia Ward, Jack knows he has failed something bigger and better than he, something he is too proud and stubborn to recognize. By any priesthood measurement of a man, he is nothing but a failure.

This is true sin, failing to acknowledge the power of the priesthood that he knows is inside of him. Every time he sins, Jack imagines dripping a tear drop of oil into a clear mountain lake. It takes a long time, and it takes a lot of drops, but eventually the slick is so vile and slimy, the pure water beneath disappears.

I am Jack's longing to swim the pure water.

ALMOST TWO YEARS after Jack Dempsey became world heavyweight champion, he faced Georges Carpentier on 2 July 1921 in Jersey City, New Jersey. Carpentier was a flamboyant Frenchman, a World War I hero who fought as the Orchid Kid. Dubbed “The Battle of the Century,” the bout was witnessed by a crowd of more than 80,000 and was the first boxing match in history with gate receipts of over $1.7 million.

Carpentier was lighter and smaller than Dempsey, but he was capable of lightning combinations, and he was tougher than steel. The Champ easily won the first round, but Carpentier responded with a ferocious second, using a sweeping overhand punch that staggered Dempsey. But then in the third round, Jack found the reserves that had always served him so well. He unleashed a brutal right-handed assault on the Frenchman, smashing his face with short stabs and then caving in his chest with a hammer blow. Carpentier was saved by the bell but fell quickly in the fourth round, when Dempsey delivered a crushing left hook to the body. The challenger got back up, but Dempsey's smack to the jaw sent him once again to the canvas. The bout was called, an undeniable victory for the Champ.

I am Jack's will to keep on fighting.

THERE'S A WORD Jack keeps in his mind, mainly when he eats the bread and drinks the water during sacrament meeting. Sometimes it's right out in the open, in the front row, demanding attention. Other times it floats to the back of his brain, out of sight, residing among old memories and feelings that Jack usually keeps buried. He feels the word creep up on him, maybe riding down the North Fork in its cold glassy water. Maybe it drifts in the wind blowing down off Mount Lamborn, stirring a steady breeze that calls out to him softly. It is a call to action, a word of two blunt syllables whose immediacy sometimes cannot be denied. It is a word he always hears but rarely acknowledges.

Repent.

Cry repentance unto the people. The way is prepared for all men who repent. They who belong to the devil's kingdom must be stirred up unto repentance.

I am Jack's urgent need to say I'm sorry.

JACK DEMPSEY'S MOST famous title defense took place on 14 September 1923 at the Polo Grounds in New York. His challenger was the brash boxer from Argentina, Luis Angel Firpo, called the Wild Bull of the Pampas. This time, 82,000 people turned out for another million-dollar gate, and because the match was broadcast live in Buenos Aires, the audience worldwide was much larger. The match lasted only three minutes and fifty-seven seconds, but in that short span, the world witnessed more dramatic boxing action than normally transpires in an entire bout.

A furious first round saw Jack knock the challenger
down seven times. Dempsey was a relentless force, battering Firpo into a bloody mess. The Argentine was infuriated and lived up to his nickname, bull-rushing Dempsey from across the ring. Firpo's charge hurled the Champ through the ropes and cast him headlong into press row. With assistance, Dempsey untangled himself from reporters and typewriters and got back into the ring in time to avoid being counted out. Firpo moved in again, this time hitting the Champ with body blows and precise head shots. Dempsey fell to the mat twice in the first round, but Firpo could not finish him.

Recovered after the break between rounds, Jack unleashed the furies and finished Firpo in fifty-seven seconds. A whirlwind of blows climaxed with an uppercut to the jaw, and the Bull was defeated. Firpo fell to the mat twice in the first round, but Firpo could not finish him.

I am Jack's undeniable destiny.

Jack's Grandfather, his dad's dad, also believed in words. He was a man who understood language. Like many dutiful Mormons, he was a meticulous record keeper. He stated two purposes in writing a memoir for his children and grandchildren: “First, I hope it will be of interest to you. Second, in being very candid about my successes and failures, I hope you will profit from my experience and make your lives more full and free from error.” The memoir describes how Jack’s grandfather served a mission in pre-World War II Germany. How he was interrogated by the Gestapo for taking pictures of Adolph Hitler during a rally in Munich. How he utilized his knowledge of German to break codes for the Allies during the war. How he faithfully and diligently served his church, his government, his family, and his people for the entirety of his life.

I am Jack's raging inferiority complex in the face of the tradition of his forefathers.

It was former U.S. Marine Gene Tunney who finally felled Jack Dempsey. More than 120,000 people, the largest crowd ever for a boxing match, watched the two gladiators meet for the first time on 23 September 1926 in Philadelphia. A steady rainfall made the canvas wet and slippery. The conditions favored the challenger, a wiry and whip-strong fighter who ended up making Dempsey look foolish. Tunney dodged the Champ's obvious attacks then countered with speed and precision. It was a marvelous display of pugilism from Tunney, who undeniably won eight of the ten rounds in the bout. The challenger cut the Champ above the eye in the fifth and had him floundering throughout. Dempsey's feet were slow, his hands soft, his jaw glass. Tunney claimed the championship by unanimous decision.

Of course there had to be a rematch. Dempsey challenged Tunney 364 days later at Soldier's Field in Chicago. It was the highest grossing boxing match in history, with gate receipts of more than 2.6 million dollars. Nearly 105,000 spectators watched as Tunney once again dominated the bout. His punches came easy and quick, battering the challenger until Dempsey was again looking slow, old, and outwitted. Jack was the victim of his own hubris, perhaps, when in the seventh round, he managed a combination that floored Tunney. Dempsey failed to retire to a neutral corner and lost several seconds while he argued with referee Dave Barry. Tunney was allowed more than ten seconds to recover, probably close to fourteen or fifteen. He got back on his feet and returned to dominating Dempsey.

Despite the unanimous decision in favor of Tunney, controversy raged after the match. Dempsey's camp claimed Barry was corrupt. But the results were undeniable. The “Fight of the Long Count” was history, and Jack Dempsey had fought his last professional bout.

I am Jack's beaten pride.

Jack remembers more words. In a letter written in 1995, Jack's granddad told him of the period in his life when he may have been a Jack...
Mormon. In February of 1937, Granddad's church attendance and participation came to an abrupt halt. “I was unemployed, my clothes were tattered and torn, and I felt uncomfortable at church, so I didn't go,” he wrote. Simple enough. But soon he found a job and bought a new suit and with his friend Art Adamson, returned to church, crisis resolved.

“I think we both continued going to show the others that we were just as good as they were, just as entitled to the good things that activity brings, and they weren't going to keep us from them,” my namesake wrote.

During elders quorum at Paonia Ward, Jack feels a similar desire. He wants to show them that he holds the same priesthood they do. He wants them to know that he has just as much right to its power as they do, regardless of how many Sundays he might or might not sit in this building.

I am Jack's strong sense of entitlement.

JACK DEMPSEY RETIRED from boxing and maintained a vigorous public life afterward. He owned a restaurant in New York City. He served in the Coast Guard during World War II and trained soldiers in fitness. He divorced his first wife, an actress, to marry a Broadway singer. He ended up marrying four times. He was known to be fiercely protective and loving of his children, and he frequently returned to Salt Lake to visit his mother.

He died at age 87 on 31 May 1983. His last words to his wife Deanna were, “Don't worry, honey, I'm too mean to die.”

I am proud that Jack Dempsey was Jack Mormon.

I AM JACK'S WAR.

Jack Dempsey stood and fought boxer after boxer, dispatching one after the other with shocking displays of physical brutality. His punching-attack style and hard-charging bravado made him the toughest fighter the sport had ever seen. His worthy competitors, men such as Jess Willard, Georges Carpentier, Luis Angel Firpo, and Gene Tunney brought out what was best in Dempsey, his fighting spirit. They helped Jack transcend his time and place and become something more than just a man. His enemies were of flesh and blood. They can't be beaten back with body blows. They can't be toppled with uppercuts. They do not help him, nor do they bring out the best in him. His arsenal is limited to a meager testimony that only he understands.

Unlike Dempsey, Jack doesn't get any breathers. He gets no reprieve, no break between rounds, and no break between opponents to gather his strength. Jack must fight constantly. He knows that the only perfect person ever to walk the planet was Jesus Christ. We are all imperfect. Despite our doctrinal shortcomings and human failures, we are all striving for something better.

In that sense, we are all Jack.

THERE'S ANOTHER WORD Jack thinks about a lot.

Early on, Jack Dempsey discovered something that took Jack Mormon many, many years to learn. An axiom that once accepted, allows the fight to go on. That once believed, provides a true path that will lead back to church as surely as it will lead away from church.

To get up off the mat, you have to forgive yourself for getting knocked down in the first place.

Forgiveness.
**ANY YEARS AGO WHEN OUR forebears started SUNSTONE, they probably dreamed that someday their magazine would dedicate almost an entire issue to talking about a vampire romance. That proud day has finally arrived.**

For those out of the pop culture loop, Stephenie Meyer, an Arizona-dwelling member of the LDS Church, has become astoundingly popular on a world-wide scale for writing a series of novels called the Twilight Saga. The books follow the adventures of Bella—an ordinary human girl, and Edward—the vampire who loves her.

The series and its author might have gone uncommented upon in this magazine’s pages but for the fact that the rest of the world is fascinated by Meyer’s Mormon-ness. For the first time, it seems that the world is saying, “Why, yes. I would like to know more!”

Ever eager to bridge the gap between Mormonism and the larger world, SUNSTONE has gathered articles that read the Twilight novels through a Mormon lens. What might run through a bishop’s mind if he saw the Cullens (Edward’s vampire “family”) walk into the chapel? How might one of Meyer’s werewolves react to a discussion of the pre-mortal existence? Could Bella’s journey into vampirism be read as a metaphor for the redemption process?

If by some quirk of fate you’re not one of the 85 million people who have read Meyer’s novels, go right to the Twilight primer below, which contains everything about the Saga you need to know in order to understand and enjoy the articles in this issue.

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**Twilight: A Primer**

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**Book III: Eclipse**

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**Book IV: Breaking Dawn**

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WEREWOLVES REALLY LATCH ONTO THE whole eternal marriage thing. Have you noticed? I don't know if there was a substantial werewolf population where you served your mission; but on mine, they would hem at how we, like others, believe in a Supreme Being, and haw at the Joseph Smith story, but once we got into sealing and the eternal bonds of matrimony and families-can-be-together-forever, they really perked up. Ask anyone who's ever taught a werewolf. They'll tell you.

Better yet, ask Stephenie Meyer, the werewolf expert. Part of what makes her monsters so interesting is where they diverge from the monstrous norm. Most pre-Twilight vampires don't sparkle, and most pre-Twilight werewolves don't believe in eternal marriage. But Meyer's do.

For all the online chatter about Stephenie Meyer and her Scary Mormon Agenda, most alarmed bloggers have overlooked how her monsters—werewolves in particular—fall into a classic Mormon literary pattern:1 the Premortal Romance.

The Premortal Romance we tend to remember best is the Douglas Stewart / Lex de Azevedo cheesefest, Saturday's Warrior, but the tradition goes back much farther than that.

EPHI ANDERSON STARTED things off in 1898 with Added Upon, a book that at one time (at least in Nephi, Utah)² was given to every young woman to read. Added Upon is Anderson's first book and by far his most popular—too bad, because it certainly isn't his best—because it appeals to something deeply Mormon in us. Beginning in the premortal realm, the story follows a boy and a girl through mortality, paradise, the Millennium, and finally to exaltation.

Out for a premortal walk one day, Honan sees Delsa's "sweet face" and is drawn to her immediately. When she sees him, a "pleased smile overspread[s] her face," and she explains that she had been making a "dream picture" of her ideal face when he arrived and that now her "dream face seem[s] to blend with [his]." Drawn together, they converse and "both faces [shine] with a soft, beautiful light. The joy within [...] too deep for words. [...] Instinctively, they [cling] to each other."³

The story of Honan and Delsa (Rupert and Signe on earth) thus becomes the prototypical Premortal Romance. When they meet on earth, they bond immediately. When Rupert first hears Signe's voice, he is "spellbound" and she, noticing him, looks upon him "steadily." One thing leads to another, and pretty soon they're in heaven again, together forever.

It's this mode of romantic relationship, popular in Mormon literature since Anderson came up with it, that Stephenie Meyer's werewolves experience.

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Sat ur d ay's

Werewolf

The most significant distinguishing trait of a Meyer were- 

wolf is “imprinting,” the sudden and permanent formation of 

a mate relationship. Jacob, the novels’ preeminent were-

wolf, describes imprinting as an experience akin to gravity: 

“When you see her,” he says, “suddenly it’s not the earth 

holding you here anymore. She does. And nothing matters 

more than her.” Even Meyer’s human heroine, Bella, recog-

nizes that an imprinted werewolf couple are “utterly right 

together, two puzzle pieces, shaped for each other exactly.” 

The vampire Edward compares imprinting to “fairies’ love 

spells, [...] like magic.” Through imprinting, Twilight’s were-

wolves find their “soul mates.” One party is bound to the 

other, becoming the other’s “perfect match. Like he was de-

signed for her alone.”

The Twilight books’ werewolves never know when (or if) 

they will imprint on someone. Once they become were-

wolves during adolescence, they may imprint at any 

time, and when they do, any prior relationship becomes 

unsustainable. An imprinted werewolf can never turn 

away from his or her imprintee.

Sudden recognition that lasts eternally? The Premortal 

Romance.

Meyer has expanded—maybe exploded—this classic device of Mormon fiction and brought to it a moral complexity missing in her progenitors’ work. Let’s look a little closer at Added Upon and Saturday’s Warrior.

After Added Upon’s Honan meets Delsa, he cannot make immediate sense of his reaction to her:

He was drawn to her more than to the many others 

who were equally valiant. As he thought of it, its 

strangeness occurred to him. Why should it be so? 

He did not know. Delsa was fair; so were all the 

daughters of God. She had attained to great intelli-

gence; so had thousands of others. Then wherein 

lay the secret of the power which drew him to her?

He has no answers and no one around seems to have 

had a similar experience. What Honan and Delsa learn 

about their upcoming mortal adventure is that, once 

born, they have no guarantee of meeting again. Yet they 

dare to hope they will, that “Father may order it that 

way.” Honan leaves first, and Delsa tells him, “You will go 

before and prepare a welcome for me. Then I will come.”

The reader’s not stupid, though. The first rule of romantic 

fiction dictates that these two will consummate their love in 
mortality. Anderson plays with that expectation, though, 

withholding identities as the reader strives to match mortals 
to their premortal counterparts. Identifying the non-

Mormon Rupert as Honan comes rather easily, but Delsa’s 

mortal identity is uncertain until Rupert meets Signe and 

they all but call each other by name.

As they fall in love, Signe teaches Rupert Mormon the-

tology and he finally suggests that “if we ever lived as intel-

ligent beings in a pre-existent state—and I now can not 

doubt it—we two knew each other there. Perhaps we were 

the closest friends.” And Signe reveals she has long felt the 

same: “Well, I seemed to know you from the first. Though 
you looked bad and like a tramp, I knew you were not, and 
I felt as if I had known you before.” Then, “they were silent 
again, ‘reading life’s meaning in each other’s eyes.’”

From then on, Rupert and Signe are like Meyer’s im-

printed werewolves. “The peace and certainty they always 

[radiate is] downright puke-inducing,” as she writes in 

Breaking Dawn.

Having finally met in mortality, Rupert and Signe are 

no longer free to pursue other romantic interests—in-

deed, they have no need to. Relationship expectations, 

now fulfilled, need only be lived and enjoyed. This is the 

state of satisfaction that will be the endgoal for all future 

premortal romantics in Mormon literature.

We don’t meet Saturday’s Warrior’s premortal romantics 

Julie and Todd until after they have already been in love 

“forever.” As they near the beginning of earth life, Julie 

panics: “What good are promises in a world where every-

thing will be forgotten?” But Todd assures her that he will 

find her. “And as for not recognizing you, that’s like 
saying that the sun and the moon and the stars will never 

recognize their glory. And beauty and virtue will never 

recognize their own!” They then enact their future 

meeting in song, claiming that “The circle of our love ex-

tends / Beyond the reach of time / Beyond the span of days 

and years, it goes forever.”

Like Rupert’s in Added Upon, Todd’s mortal search for 
gospel truth climaxes with his discovery of lost, premortal 

love. Julie, however, is born into a Mormon family and is 

thus wrapped up in a quest for love from the beginning.

When we first meet her as a Mormon mortal, she is en-
gaged to Wally, whom she abandons for Peter, later re-
turning to Wally who, as a returning missionary, brings 

the newly converted Todd with him. Upon seeing each 

other, Julie and Todd sing the song they last sang in pre-
mortality. And in true imprinted-werewolf fashion, they 

are lost to any other potential mates—even to one 

standing right next to them.

This distinction between a premortal romance and a 

merely mortal romance is a typical component of the 
genre. Before meeting Signe, Rupert had been betrothed 
to someone else. And the first Twilight werewolf to im-
print, Sam, had been in a committed relationship with 

Leah before imprinting on Emily. But here we get into 

Meyer’s strengths. Her handling of the mate-swap offers 

the arguably more mature perspective I’ve been hinting at.

When Saturday’s Warrior’s Wally is horrified by Julie’s 

abandonment, his friend tells him, “It’s all part of the plan, 

remember?” And Rupert’s fiancée conveniently 

dumps him, leaving him free to discover Signe. But in 

Meyer’s world, for Sam to be with Emily, he must abruptly 

abandon her cousin Leah. “And that’s what happened. He 

broke Leah’s heart. He went back on every promise he’d 

ever made her.”

That word “promise” is key. Each of Saturday’s Warrior’s
major characters makes premortal promises to be fulfilled while on earth, and the individual character arcs see these promises met. The script generally avoids having characters make conflicting promises after the veil falls, and those who do must recognize their error and fulfill only the premortal promise in order to be happy. Julie’s stress and uncertainty are not alleviated until she has her “imprinting” experience, nullifying her engagement to Wally.

In Added Upon, Rupert’s promises were broken by another, leaving him morally unconflicted. This conflict between promises mortal and eternal—and Sam the werewolf’s struggle to resolve them—shows a new complexity in the previously simplistic trope of the premortal romance. Sam’s bliss with his soul mate is tainted by self-loathing.

Julie and Todd experienced instant certainty that the “circle of [their] love [began] In God’s eternal plan”; Rupert and Signe shared a “glimpse of past glories”; but Meyer’s werewolves have no simple, doctrinal explanation to fall back on. Their devotion is accompanied by broken promises and heartbreak, making any pre-imprinting relationship hazardous and uncertain. If imprinting is a form of the premortal romance, it is a version in which mortal events do not agreeably follow a forgotten script.

But this alteration, in addition to making for a more complex fiction, better confronts a key Mormon concept: agency. The very concept of a soul mate suggests that the question, “Whom shall I marry?” has but one correct response and that each person must live in fear of inflicting pain on others while seeking a fated, imprint-like experience. Spencer W. Kimball famously said (and his timing suggests he may have been responding to Saturday’s Warrior), “Soul mates are fiction and an illusion.” A mirage leading one away from self-directed, agency-based, mate-seeking into a sort of romantic roulette in hopes of accidentally finding the one-and-only soul mate.

Indeed, a one-and-only soul mate, as demonstrated by Added Upon and Saturday’s Warrior, is never a matter of agency. In neither story is the premortal falling-in-love shown to be a matter of choosing. It’s a matter of happening. And if such soul mates do exist, then President Kimball was wrong: soul mates aren’t fiction—agency is. The soul-mate conceit—the entire premortal romance—conflicts with a core Mormon doctrine.

So when the werewolf Leah—whom Sam rejected when he imprinted on Emily—wants to have her romantic choices made for her, Jacob rightly calls her on that desire, calling it “just another way of getting your choices taken away from you.” She parries that “Sam, Jared, Paul, Quil. . . don’t seem to mind,” to which Jacob replies, “None of them have a mind of their own.” Is the price of being happy the loss of personal freedom?

Jacob attempts to take control of his romantic interests when he leaves Bella to allow her to pursue another. But this use of his agency plunges Jacob into romantic agony, leading him to double back on his words to Leah and covet the agency-free imprinting process. “Seemed like maybe getting your choices taken away from you wasn’t the very worst thing in the world. Maybe feeling like this was the worst thing in the world.”

Any attempt by the reader to resolve the apparent disconnect between agency and happiness requires a return to Meyer’s Mormon heritage and the climactic event in Mormonism’s premoral narrative. As Added Upon’s Honan describes the conflict, the question was whether to “retain our agencies to choose” or “without that privilege . . . cease to be intelligences, and become as inanimate things . . . [saved without] choice on our part.” This, according to Mormon understanding, was the central conflict of premortal life, and Meyer’s adaptation of the premortal romance for her werewolves revives the War in Heaven here in the mortal plane. She thus showcases the difficulties inherent in the premortal-romance formula, giving her werewolves neither a “glimpse of past glories” nor an “atmosphere of peace and assurance” nor a
sense of “why they’re here / [Nor] . . . who they really are.”

Instead, Meyer’s werewolves are left with no comforts beyond those given them in relationships they did not choose for themselves. And Meyer doesn’t allow the question of agency to slip to the side with a manufactured pre-mortal excuse. She has not forgotten that, in Mormon doctrine, agency “is the specific gift by which God made his children in his image and empowered them to grow to become like him through their own progression of choices.”9 The werewolves’ loss of agency in this matter suggests a stopped progression and complicates the pat conclusions presented in previous premortal romances. Speaking with Time Magazine, Meyer calls free will, “a huge gift from God.”10 By stripping it from her werewolves, by making their happiness dependent on losing their freedom, she makes an artistic choice that resonates more deeply with readers who understand the decidedly Mormon ethos on which she made that choice.

Which is exactly why we as Saints need to redouble our efforts to bring the gospel to these tortured souls. Just imagine the werewolves’ joy when we explain to them that they, like Rupert and Signe, like Julie and Todd, were not forced into love by the vagaries of nature but encountered each other long ago, before the worlds were, as they sat in a heavenly council, surreptitiously holding hands as the creation of the earth was planned.

NOTES

1. No, not the creepy-stalker-boy-who-follows-you-around-but-won’t-sleep-with-you pattern. Although it does offer that, too. But those are vampires. They never get past the first discussion.
2. My father’s hometown. I hear lots of strange things happened there in the ’50’s and ’60’s.
3. If you didn’t receive Added Upon as a gift from your ward upon turning twelve, you can read it for free online at Project Gutenberg (gutenberg.org). The site also offers Anderson’s masterpiece, Dorian.
4. Another trait of the premortal romance is the cheesy line. Here’s one. Prepare yourself for more.
5. Whatever the heck that means.
6. Poor Wally.
7. More comforting words were never spoken.
THE TWILIGHT SERIES, CALLED “AMERICA’S answer to Harry Potter,” has sold 85 million copies worldwide, been translated into 38 languages, and migrated to the movie screen, grossing $384 million on Twilight and $570 million on New Moon (in the first two weeks). Stephenie Meyer was the bestselling fiction author of 2008, and Twilight has exceeded even the Harry Potter series, not in sales (85 million vs. 400 million), but in staying power, on the top ten for five years. In total sales, Twilight’s four-book series rank #16 among all-time bestsellers—six places after #10 The Book of Mormon (140 million). Meyer has sold more books than any other Mormon except Joseph Smith. Citing The Book of Mormon as having “the most significant impact on [my] life,” Meyer may be on her way to equaling its success.

What is the magic that captivates 85 million readers, 100 million moviegoers, and 20 million video viewers? “I don’t know why I’ve gotten the response I have,” she admits. Meyer’s books have been criticized as “extremely poorly written” and “full of soft, pillowy language,” having “prose [that] was just awful” and “incomplete characters.” Readers consume 2444 pages dominated by teenage small talk for a compelling plot buried in a narrative of adolescent angst. “The problem here is the story, or the lack of it,” say critics who see little value in Twilight.

Similar criticisms were made of The Da Vinci Code (“bad writing” and “riddled with errors”), Harry Potter (“too popular” and “silly”), The Lord of the Rings (“It reminds me of The Book of Mormon,” panned Harold Bloom) and The Book of Mormon (“chloroform in print” complained Mark Twain). Are millions of people simply being duped by loving such books? Would 200 million crave Twilight unless it offers something worthwhile? Successful stories may lack sophisticated style or literary standards, in fact they strain or reinvent genre, as did the Christian gospels, Tolkien, and The Book of Mormon. However, what they do have is a mythic power—an emotional, psychological, or spiritual effect on the reader that’s like a religious experience. “Stephenie has tapped into something very deep in her readers, and they respond on an emotional level.”

Twilight is successful because it touches a universal nerve, answers a psychological need, with symbolic and mythic themes. After all, Twilight came from a dream, where the psyche or soul reveals itself, its needs, and its answers. Meyer’s myth resonates because it engages issues in the psyche for a critical mass of people. For readers, Twilight is a waking dream, a myth that lives.

MYTHOPOEIA

THE SIMPLEST EXPLANATION for Twilight’s effect on fans is “the power of myth” as Joseph Campbell termed it—the
ability of a mythic story to reveal truths, teach us about ourselves and our world, and inform our lives. Meyer's myth possesses readers and invokes their innermost desires for fulfillment. "People do not want to just read Meyer's books; they want to climb inside them and live there." Rather than lacking in "story," *Twilight* is rich in plot or "mythos."

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle cited plot or mythos as the most important element in drama or tragedy, "the soul of a tragedy" that permeates the story. The ultimate aim of plot is to produce real emotion in the reader or viewer—actual feelings of sadness, desire, love, loathing, fear, pity, or terror. "Fear and pity may be aroused by spectacular means; but they may also result from the inner structure of the piece, which is the better way, and indicates a superior poet. For the plot ought to be so constructed that, even without the aid of the eye, he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes place."

*Twilight*’s power radiates from its plot or myth, of impossible ultimate love between a tragic hero and heroine who pass through traumatic personal tests to find solutions. Meyer follows a classic formula of flawed humans, gods, monsters, and heroes all locked in personal and cosmic conflicts while pursuing love that is often doomed. She uses mythic creatures (vampires and shapeshifters), archetypal struggles (superhuman vs. human, animal vs. divine), and mythic patterns (the quest for immortality or redemption). Her settings are otherworldly—the Olympic Peninsula with its mist-shrouded Mount Olympus, home of gods and mythic creatures; Port Angeles, the landing place of angels; and Forks, a place where choices are made and played out.

Symbols are plentiful in this myth. The Fall of Adam and Eve, as depicted on the book’s cover and front pages, are reversed in the story of Edward’s and Bella’s transformation and redemption. Bella’s move from Arizona (desert, sunlight) to Washington (rainforest, shadows) echoes the journey from known to unknown realms, and earthly to heavenly abodes. Her red truck can be read as a symbol of blood and alchemical transformation. Even the phases of mitosis in her biology class hint at metamorphosis. The symbols speak transition, change.

For fans, the mythic world of *Twilight* is so real it seems to have an independent life of its own. They enter the myth—it becomes real for them, within. As with other popular mythic worlds, such as *Lord of the Rings*, *Star Trek*, or *Star Wars*, fans yearn to live the myth by visiting locations, or dressing like characters they identify with. Thousands of visitors throng to Forks, Washington, on a quest to find Bella, Edward, Jacob, Charley, the Cullens, and the *Twilight* environment.

The Otherworldly realms like *Twilight*, *Harry Potter*, and *The Lord of the Rings* “have a freestanding internal integrity that makes you feel as if you should be able to buy real estate there.” This is living mythos, a dimension beyond the ordinary world that a seeker can visit, revisit, and describe in detail. Tolkien experienced “Middle-earth” this way, as a self-existent realm he entered, experienced, and wrote about. He employed the term “mythopoeia” to describe the mythic quality or world of a literary work that has a living truth of its own. *Twilight* achieves mythopoeia. Meyer confirms this. “I suppose the psychological challenge was accepting that Edward

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and Bella weren't real people. (I still don't entirely believe that.) I forget that it's not real. I'm living the story, and I think people can read that sincerity about the characters. They are real to me while I'm writing them, and I think that makes them real to the readers as well.\[^{11}\]

THE HEROINE'S JOURNEY

TWILIGHT IS A myth about true love, ideal love, ultimate love, “how love changes who you are.”\[^{13}\] Meyer says. “I think it’s romance more than anything else . . . that’s really the strongest emotion.”\[^{14}\] Yet this love story is more than a quest for romantic love; it’s a quest for self fulfillment.

Meyer sees Twilight’s success partly due to Bella’s being an everygirl. “She’s not a hero . . . she’s normal.”\[^{15}\] Meyer describes herself the same way: “Ninety-five percent of the time, I’m just Mom . . . doing the normal thing.”\[^{16}\] Yet it’s the ordinary “everyman” who takes the archetypal “hero’s journey.” Bella, a bumbling introvert, leaves her familiar world and enters an unknown realm of perils where her courage and strength are tested by monsters and death at every turn. She embarks on a personal odyssey. She begins as a damsel in distress then learns to find her own power, survive all dangers, defeat all foes, rescue her beloved, embrace transformation, master her potential, and becomes an immortal.

Dressed as Bella, Ashley Garber, stands in front of “Bella's Truck” in Forks, Washington, where the Twilight Saga is set.

For fans, the mythic world of Twilight is so real it seems to have an independent life of its own. Fans yearn to live the myth by visiting locations or dressing like characters they identify with.

This myth arose from a woman’s dream, the subconscious female psyche. “My 30th birthday was coming up and . . . I didn’t feel I had much going for me. I had my kids, but there wasn’t much I was doing,” Meyer says. This was the context and cause—the dream of motherhood seemed wanting. Meyer escaped her ennui via another dream where a young, single, childless version of herself meets a godlike man, a glowing immortal male. Perhaps the ideal mate is superhuman. “In my dream, two people were having an intense conversation in a meadow in the woods. One of these people was just your average girl. The other person was fantastic—beautiful, sparkly, and a vampire. They were discussing the difficulties inherent in the facts that they were falling in love with each other while the vampire was particularly attracted to the scent of her blood, and was having a difficult time restraining himself from killing her immediately.”\[^{18}\]

This godman is conflicted. He is burdened by vampiric urges to consume; yet he yearns for healing and redemption via his missing feminine companion. He is a paradox—half god/half monster, half divine/half vampire, half savior/half devil, half angel/half demon.

One of Meyer’s strengths as a writer is utilizing paradox—brought opposite views into dialogue—about gender, love, identity, marriage, power, and relationship. Twilight marries opposites with palpable tension. “It was the combination of desire and danger that drew me in,” Meyer explains.\[^{19}\] This is the power in Edward and Bella’s relationship.

Perhaps underlying all characters, themes and symbols,
the crux of Meyer's myth is an archetypal tension of mutually exclusive realities, the struggle of opposites to know each other and find some harmony or union.

MORMON AND FEMINIST SUBTEXTS

FEMINISTS HAVE CRITICIZED Bella as being a powerless female fatale ever in need of rescue, or an enabler enmeshed in a codependent relationship with an abusive male. But Meyer considers herself and her books feminist. “True feminism is about choice. It means that a woman can do whatever will bring her the most happiness,” she says. Even Robert Pattinson, who plays Edward in the Twilight movies, agrees, “Everyone looks at Edward as the hero, and he’s continuously saved by the damsel in distress.”

Meyer explores both feminist and female fatale positions through Bella’s contradictory qualities. Bella is both disempowered and empowered. She’s independent, tomboyish, self-possessed, studious, a loner, averse to marriage. She’s also helpless, vulnerable, afraid, dependent, and consumed by love and need for Edward. Meyer shows us Bella’s powerlessness and power, failures and successes, the journey integrating all positions from weak to strong into a wholeness of personal transformation. Bella reveals all parts of the female self, from cipher to superwoman, letting femaleness be what it is. Meyer is engaging the feminist struggle for authentic self. Bella becomes a new creature who wields her own destiny. Meyer takes Bella all the way to hero. She overcomes all limitations, even transcending Mormon theology.

MORMONISM

“I REALLY DON’T write about religion, and my characters aren’t specifically religious in any way,” Meyer says. But then recants, “Unconsciously, I put a lot of my basic beliefs into the story.” Mormonism enters the myth because Meyer’s dream and story were shaped by a Mormon psyche.

Meyer is a Mormon and a feminist writing about theological themes, which means Twilight can be read as a kind of Mormon feminist theology. She works through theological questions, using Mormon doctrine in unique ways, simultaneously owning and resisting it.

“So the Lion fell in love with the Lamb,” is Edward’s confession to Bella; this echoes the Mormon hymn, “The Spirit of God Like a Fire Is Burning” where “the lamb and the lion shall lie down together without any ire.” Meanwhile the Quileute natives (the wolves) could be read as a Book of Mormon metaphor for the Tribes of Israel with Jacob and Ephraim Black inheriting a lineage of power (shapeshifting) like the descendants of Jacob/Israel via Joseph-Ephraim-Manasseh. Meyer includes a girl, Leah Clearwater, in that lineage or priesthood.

Meyer’s vampires and wolves are devoted monogamists; they mate “forever” via an “imprinting” of souls, much like Mormon “eternal marriage.” Yet Meyer does not portray relationships, even marriage, as secure or eternal, but as prone to change. Bella does find her eternal soul mate, yet she has to forge her own salvation. She receives the transfusion of immortality from Edward, yet she evolves further, developing her own unique powers and being. Rather than relying on eternal codependency, the real purpose of relationship is self transformation. Also, in Twilight's version of eternal marriage, Edward isn’t a polygamist, yet Bella seems polyandrist, torn between two soulmates. Edward and Jacob are a polyandrous tension that continues to the end of book three. Jacob and Edward are also a metaphor for Bella’s own dual nature, the tension between earthly vs. divine, temporal vs. spiritual, mortality vs. immortality.

The Twilight world has “Mormon vampires” who resemble the LDS idea of a “translated” being—a transmuted mortal body of impervious flesh, undying but not yet eternal, skin that shines, veins without blood, supernatural but not yet god, a temporary immortal. Eternity is uncertain, final salvation isn’t sure, they are still working out their redemption in fear and trembling, with possible failure, still vulnerable to sin or death. Also, the Mormon notion of “the Fall” (from immortal to mortal) is answered by a vampiric version of reversal from mortal to immortal, the vampire as metaphor for Mormon translation or half-redemption.

Free agency drives Twilight’s plot, as true power in every situation to renegotiate tragedy, choice is the mechanism of success. “I really think that’s the underlying metaphor of my vampires,” said Meyer. “You always have a choice to be better, no matter your circumstances.” Yet the reverse is also true—a vampire can be a metaphor for lack of choice, being trapped by circumstances, drained by responsibilities, living in the death of one’s dreams.

All along, Bella rejects both marriage and motherhood, then finally makes the choice for both. Delivering a baby is nearly fatal (a statement about risks and sacrifices of childbearing?) yet results in a godchild, both mortal and immortal, the result of union between a godlike father and human mother.

Family is central in Twilight; yet Bella leaves her family of birth for an immortal family, like being called by Christ to forsake the world, live a higher law, and join a spiritual family. The Cullens transcend both the human world and the vampire world; Carlisle is a Christ figure who overcomes the world then calls others to follow him. Redemption in Twilight is found via relationship—humans, vampires, and wolves are not saved in isolation.

What else might the vampire symbolize? Meyer’s vampires are godlike beings, half-divine, so “vampire” might be read as “god” or “religion.” The vampire can symbolize the shadow of religion, which has both darkness and light. The Cullens evoke an American religion whose founder Carlisle echoes Joseph Smith, while the Volturi are ancient Italians, seemingly Catholic. Could Edward himself as godman symbolize Meyer’s religion, a metaphor for Mormonism or the Mormon god? Does religion itself have a dual personality, human and divine, offering salvation and seduction? Meyer’s vampires are Mormon, but is Mormonism vampiric (in the subconscious...
This is the hero’s quest from a feminine perspective: a woman’s metamorphosis from helpless to heroine. Meyer has done for the heroine what Tolkien and Lucas did for the hero.

mind)? The vampire metaphor captures the paradoxical human nature of religion and god—the whole creature both flawed and ideal, good and bad, animal and divine.

Meyer’s myth came from a dream, a night vision of an angelic being. This set her life on a course of pursuing that vision to its conclusion, resulting in a book about immortality and redemption, read by millions around the world. This has echoes of Joseph Smith’s story, whose first book was world-changing too. Oddly enough, it seems both books were written from the middle to end, the first part written last. After losing his first 116 pages (25%), Joseph apparently dictated from Mosiah to Moroni, then dictated 1st Nephi to Words of Mormon to finish.23 Meyer did the same thing. “I wrote from the middle through to the end, and then went back and wrote the beginning until the two pieces matched up. To be honest, I feel like I was guided through that process.”24 Meyer, like Smith, entered a visionary process, a very Mormon practice. To have a vision is to be a seer of otherworldly realms and beings.

Ultimately, Twilight is not an allegory or allusion to one specific theme—vampirism or Mormonism—it’s a modern myth, original and self-existent, arising from the subconscious mind. Meyer’s dream is revelatory, conveying the unconscious, transcendent, archetypal, and symbolic. The word “twilight” itself means shadowland between light and darkness, known and unknown, where mysterious images, figures, and messages are not distinct or exact, but encountered and interpreted individually. Twilight takes readers on a journey to find their own monsters and gods, losses and love, tests and triumphs, myth and meanings.

NOTES

15. Ibid.
17. Irwin, “Charmed.”
19. Irwin, “Charmed.”
WHEN YOU HEAR OF VAMPIRES, YOU MAY think of vicious, fanged, reanimated corpses prowling the night in search of human victims to satisfy their blood lust. Or perhaps you think of suave, attractive, terribly sexy creatures trying to seduce innocents into their orgiastic nightlife of blood-drinking and debauchery. Well, clearly, you haven't met the Cullens! They're a quiet, prosperous, well-behaved family with a tasteful home just outside of Forks, Washington. The Cullens are the best neighbors you could ever hope to have, and they're not just your average nice family—they're almost the ideal LDS family!

Since Bram Stoker's *Dracula* set the standard in 1897 for vampires as pure evil and completely uninterested in sex, vampires slowly have been gaining humanity. These days, they sometimes use their hearts as well as (blush) other organs. It's been a gradual change, perhaps more obvious in films than in literature: *Dracula's Daughter* (1936) showed a vampire who was conflicted about her blood-drinking, *The Horror of Dracula* (1958) gave the Count revenge as an excuse for his attacks, and 1972's *Blacula* showed a vampire who committed suicide by sunlight rather than turn the woman he loved into one of the Undead.

In literature, Anne Rice's 1976 novel *Interview with the Vampire* gave us our first seriously angst-ridden, guilt-tortured vampire—Louis. Louis does feed off humans; it's just that he feels bad about it afterward; just like humans who—right after finishing off a heavenly cheesecake—feel guilty about going off their diets. Since Rice, other authors have delved into the concept of the vampire-with-a-conscience. 1989 saw the publication of the first installment of Fred Saberhagen's series, *The Dracula Tapes*. In this version of the Dracula tale, the Count is quite a decent person, albeit a bit arrogant. He is, after all, an aristocrat. He may occasionally kill someone, but the victim definitely deserves it. Also, we learn that when it comes to the ladies, the Count likes more than just a nibble on the neck. And he can make babies.

In 1990, Patricia Nead Elrod offered us *Bloodlist*, the first book in *The Vampire Series*. The protagonist, Jack Fleming, is the same nice guy he was before his untimely murder, but he now has some convenient extra abilities that require him to alter his lifestyle a little. Drinking blood is necessary for his survival, though animal blood is adequate for his dietary needs. But catch Jack in a candid moment, and he'll admit that human blood does have a certain tang that can be hard to resist. The few vampires Jack knows are also very careful about preserving human life, even the vampire who was a serial killer as a human! Good folks all. Oh, and these vampires definitely like sex—a factor Elrod uses to spice up the stories. However, unlike Saberhagen's baby-making vampire Count, Jack Fleming is sterile.

Charlaine Harris's Bill Compton, the vampire hero of *Dead until Dark*, emerged in 2001. Although Compton was a pretty decent fellow, he was no saint and could resist human blood only because he could substitute the recently-invented synthetic “true blood” for the real thing. He doesn't seem to feel particularly guilty about deaths he may have previously caused, but he's “mainstreaming” now and generally avoids killing. His vampire friends are not always that careful. And oh yes! Bill's very good in bed and likes a few swigs of blood when he climaxes—something Harris describes in lots of juicy detail. But again—no babies.

Which brings us to our focus on *Twilight’s* famous Cullen family. Stephenie Meyer's vampires are a new breed altogether. They have no problems with running water, wood, silver, or holy symbols of any denomination. They don't need coffins, they don't get burned by the sun, nor do they shapeshift into bats, wolves, or mist. They don't even have fangs, just bright-white, razor-sharp teeth! However, they are physically cold to the touch, with stone-like bodies of flesh and bone (but no blood) that sparkle like crystal in direct sunlight. They're also

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**VAMPIRE FAMILIES ARE FOREVER**

By H. Davis Farnsworth

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H. DAVIS FARNSWORTH, who has been fascinated with vampires since age 10, is now a blood-sucking attorney in Salt Lake City. An essay of his was published in *Bloodsuckers: Vampires at the Movies*, edited by Scott Nance.
Jasper

~ Winsome
~ Pragmatic
~ Highly spiritual relationship with wife

Alice

~ Ravishing
~ Psychic (i.e. follows the Spirit)
~ Consummate event coordinator

Carlisle

~ Greek-god handsome
~ Served a two decade mission!
~ Doctor
~ Good Provider
~ Patriarchal
Emmett

~Hunky
~Athletic
~Forgiving
~Overcame “Word of Wisdom” problem

Rosalie

~Exquisite
~Born in the covenant
~Motherhood is major life goal
~Anti-abortion

Esme

~Gorgeous
~Ardent convert
~Full-time homemaker
~Family is always first priority
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Bram Stoker Dracula</th>
<th>Anne Rice The Vampire Chronicles</th>
<th>Fred Saberhagen The Dracula Series</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fangs</td>
<td>Permanent but not obvious</td>
<td>Permanent but not obvious</td>
<td>Permanent but not obvious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffins/Home Soil</td>
<td>Home soil required for daytime rest</td>
<td>Coffin or underground during daylight hours</td>
<td>Home soil required during daylight hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effects of Sunlight</td>
<td>Aware but usually immobile, no super senses if mobile</td>
<td>Sunlight deadly; unaware during day</td>
<td>Aware but immobile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reproduction</td>
<td>Drink vampire blood and die from blood loss</td>
<td>Drink vampire blood and die from blood loss</td>
<td>Born a vampire or drink vampire blood and die from any cause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercourse</td>
<td>No interest; sexual overtones, but still Victorian</td>
<td>No interest</td>
<td>Yes, but no kissing scenes and no nuptial bleeding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babies</td>
<td>Impossible</td>
<td>Impossible</td>
<td>Definitely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Highly religious</td>
<td>Agnostic/Catholic background</td>
<td>Highly religious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscience</td>
<td>Pure evil</td>
<td>Possible to be conflicted</td>
<td>Possible; Dracula can respond kindness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to Love</td>
<td>Too self-centered</td>
<td>Possible with another vampire</td>
<td>Possible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypnosis</td>
<td>Definitely</td>
<td>No, but persuasive</td>
<td>Definitely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apparent Age</td>
<td>Perfect body from time of change but can become young</td>
<td>Perfected body from time of change mature to adulthood</td>
<td>Perfect body from time of change mature to adulthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Kill</td>
<td>Stake and decapitate</td>
<td>Fire, sunlight, pierce heart, dismember</td>
<td>Stake and decapitate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaknesses</td>
<td>Religious symbols, garlic and occult protections</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Religious symbols, garlic and occult protections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Life</td>
<td>Possibly polygamous</td>
<td>Loose covens</td>
<td>Generally unattached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude towards Humans</td>
<td>Food and servants</td>
<td>Food, but they can be interesting</td>
<td>Generally interesting, but Dracula an aristocrat and a snob</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>Curse from God or infected by one who is cursed</td>
<td>Demon entered first vampire, who passed on the infections</td>
<td>Not stated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vampire Through the Age

**SUNSTONE**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traits</th>
<th>Patricia Neal Elrod <em>The Vampire Files</em></th>
<th>Charlaine Harris <em>The Sookie Stackhouse Novels</em></th>
<th>Stephenie Meyer <em>The Twilight Saga</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protrude when aroused or angered</td>
<td>Protrude when aroused or angered</td>
<td>No fangs; razor-sharp, bright white teeth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daylight</td>
<td>Home soil required during daylight hours</td>
<td>Coffin or underground during daylight hours</td>
<td>Not necessary; never sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not deadly, but unconscious</td>
<td>Potentially deadly, but generally unconscious</td>
<td>No danger, but glisten in direct sunlight.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vampire</td>
<td>Drink vampire blood and die from any cause</td>
<td>Drink vampire blood, lie with a vampire in a grave, etc; complex</td>
<td>Poisoned by vampire venom, heart must spread venom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bitten</td>
<td>Bite during sex; normal intercourse</td>
<td>Really good, especially if they bite, and we get details!</td>
<td>Definitely, but after the passionate kiss, it fades to black . . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impossible</td>
<td>Impossible</td>
<td>Impossible</td>
<td>Breaking Dawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not religiously inclined</td>
<td>Not important</td>
<td>May ponder theological issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindly</td>
<td>Like any human</td>
<td>Possible, but not easy</td>
<td>Possible, but not easy or common.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely</td>
<td>Absolutely</td>
<td>Absolutely, that's the whole point!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Eye whammy”</td>
<td>“Glamor”</td>
<td>“Dazzle”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ange or</td>
<td>Usually perfect young adult of approximately 22 years</td>
<td>Perfect body from time of change</td>
<td>Perfect body from time of change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stake and decapitate</td>
<td>Fire, sunlight, stake</td>
<td>Dismember and burn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occult</td>
<td>Wooden weapons, open/running water</td>
<td>Garlic, silver, wooden stake</td>
<td>Fire, werewolf teeth or vampire teeth only!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage possible</td>
<td>Nests, marriage possible</td>
<td>Covens; Cullens are a family, most pair up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vampires are</td>
<td>Humans are equals, friends, and lovers</td>
<td>Humans are lesser species to some, but valuable to others</td>
<td>Food to most, but worthwhile to the Cullens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A disease, but only a few are susceptible after death</td>
<td>Not specifically stated but apparently a natural state</td>
<td>Possibly evolution or another creation of God</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ageless and exceptionally beautiful, except for the evil James. He's nothing special. In other words, instead of being traditional vampires, the Cullens bear a striking resemblance to LDS resurrected beings.

Although all her vampires share the physical nature of resurrected beings, Meyer does not create a society in which all vampires are good. Most are individuals or mated pairs of nomads who actively kill humans, generally feeding about every two weeks. Only the "vegetarian" Cullens of Forks, Washington, and the Denali Clan of Denali, Alaska, are able to live peacefully among humans for any length of time.

But the differences go deeper than that. In other words, if the Cullens showed up in church one day, the bishop, the Relief Society president, and the leadership of the Young Men and Young Women would all weep for joy. Why? Because they would be witnessing their perfect replacements. The fact is, every member of the Cullen family would fit beautifully into any LDS ward.

CARLISLE CULLEN, ELDEST member of the coven, has never strayed from his personal commitment to abstain from human blood. In fact, he works as an emergency room doctor, where he takes pride in using his vampiric powers to help diagnose and treat humans. He believes in God; he is the spiritual leader of the coven, and the "creator" of Esme, Edward, Emmett, and Rosalie—having transformed them all into vampires only when there was no hope left of saving their human lives. He spent a few decades in Italy where he preached the vegetarian "gospel" to the Volturri. He is a good provider, has an insatiable thirst for knowledge, and sets an excellent example for the family (oops, coven) in every way. Give that guy the priesthood, and there's no stopping him!

Esme is compassion incarnate, and motherhood is her greatest joy. Even though she's physically only slightly older than Edward, Rosalie, Emmett, Alice, and Jasper (who range in physical age from seventeen to twenty), she regards them as her children. Esme socializes to some degree with the human women of Forks but does not work outside the home. No mention is made of her having any education. She always puts her family first and follows Carlisle's patriarchal lead. When Jacob's werewolf pack becomes alienated from the other werewolves, she takes pity and offers them food and clothing. She's not a pushover though, taking her "children" to task if they misbehave and willingly fighting alongside her family when it becomes necessary. We know, however, that she has had her vampire moments. For example, in Eclipse, we learn that Esme has tasted human blood. But hey—what's repentance for anyway?

Edward was the first to join Carlisle, and though he initially followed Carlisle's non-violent example, he went through a rebellious period of about two years, hunting down murderers. After a while, though, he grew to dislike killing and returned to Carlisle, repentant and committed to abstaining from human blood. Tell me a guy like that couldn't hold a Young Men's quorum rapt for an hour. Edward also ponders matters such as the meaning of life and the existence of God, heaven, and hell. He has two graduate degrees and commits to attending Dartmouth College with Bella. Because he wants to emulate Carlisle, he plans to study medicine. Best of all, he refuses to have sex with Bella until after they're married, saying that he's just as virginal as she is. He admits to having lied, stolen, and killed, but we find it easy to forgive him. Somehow we believe his lies, thefts, and killings have always been deserved, justified, or otherwise for the greater good.

Next to join the coven was Rosalie. While human, her only stated goal was to be a wife and mother (albeit a wealthy one with servants to do the work). In a sad turn of events, her fiancé raped and murdered her, robbing her of motherhood forever. Although she finds her true soul mate in Emmett, we several times read that Rosalie would give up everything, including Emmett, to be human again. Imagine her in testimony meetings! In Midnight Sun and Breaking Dawn, we learn that Rosalie and Emmett have a very active sex life. Voila! The perfect Marriage and Family Relationships instructors!

Emmett was being slaughtered and about to be devoured by a bear when Rosalie found and brought him to Carlisle for transformation. They have been committed to each other since. At every turn, Emmett sees the joy in life. He's incredibly strong and highly athletic. Early on, he did have some problem with "the rules" and killed at least two people, but he is well-behaved now—as every good Mormon male is. He isn't a deep thinker (another plus), and is very friendly, probably the perfect service activity coordinator for the youth program.

Attracted by the non-violent lifestyle, Alice and Jasper came to the Cullens on their own accord. Alice perceived the advantages of a future with the Cullen's family through her psychic abilities, or as we Latter-day Saints would express it, she "followed the Spirit" to peace in the gentle lifestyle Carlisle Cullen offered. Though she has no yearning for motherhood, she is a superb event planner and fashionista par excellence! Can anyone say, "Activities coordinator"?

Throughout Twilight, Midnight Sun, New Moon, Eclipse, and the first half of Breaking Dawn, Jasper is the weakest of the group when it comes to abstaining from human blood. But every perfect family needs a black sheep, right? Jasper is the only member of the coven/family who lived as a human-blood-drinking vampire before joining the Cullens. His years as a military officer in the Confederate Army followed him into his vampire life, making it a constant, unremitting war. He had a long-term vampire lover, Maria, before he met his soul mate in Alice, to whom he is now married. He has the ability to modify the moods of those around him, making him a perfect counselor in the elders quorum ("You will do your home teaching!"). But he's also constantly buffeted by the moods of those around him. Jasper's military career makes him a brilliant strategist when his skills are called on in Eclipse. No doubt his Boy Scout troop will always win Capture the Flag. Though Jasper has much difficulty with Carlisle's way of life, his commitment to Alice is so strong that he continues to be obedient to the vegetarian gospel.

Moving past the Cullens' ideal qualities for virtually every
ward calling, they have another gift that’s the sure sign of a chosen people—good looks. Though Rosalie is the most gorgeous woman in the world, Alice and Esme are also incredible beauties. To Bella, Edward is a Greek god, Carlisle is “Zeus’s better-looking younger brother,” and Emmett and Jasper are extremely attractive. After Bella goes through the “refiner’s fire” and is transformed, she too is “dazzling.” If you’re going to be ideal, you need to be attractive.

And if ever a group put “family first,” it’s the Cullens. Together, they play baseball and football, go hunting and camping, and kick the butts of vampires who are evil. When there are disagreements, they sit down at the dining room table for a “family council.” My Mo-dar is going crazy. How about yours?

They’re completely loyal to other family members with their primary loyalty focused on their spouses. Moreover, if it’s necessary for the protection of a family member, they will defend each other physically and, if necessary, relocate. They’re also monogamous. They marry for love and expect to be with their spouse forever.

Although they’re not related by blood, their commitment to protecting human life gives them a common goal. This is their version of the “gospel” and “Word of Wisdom.” They’re generous to others and not just because they are wealthy. Carlisle gives his time and talents to patients and other doctors. He quickly and willingly goes to look after Jacob Black in Eclipse. Esme sends their “once worn” clothes to Good Will. (There’s evidently no DI in Forks or Port Angeles.) When the Cullens realize how much Jacob Black, along with Seth and Leah Clearwater, have given up to protect their family, Bella, Edward, and Esme offer anything they have to help the werewolves. Seth and Jacob eventually accept the offer, and the Cullens seem to truly welcome the werewolves into their home. (Well, except for Rosalie, but that’s Stephenie Meyer giving us some comic relief.)

Although a loving daughter who cares deeply for her human parents, once Bella marries into the Cullen family and becomes a Cullen mother, she is “converted” and thus a permanent Cullen vampire. She continues her relationship with her father, but her loyalties lie with her husband and his family. She’s been “sealed” to her husband for time and all eternity.

The Cullens try to set a good example for their fellow vampires and are more than willing to preach their belief system. Kate of the Denali Clan successfully converts Gerard in Breaking Dawn, but Irina is not so successful with Laurent. He tries for a while, but falls away and is eventually killed by the werewolves for trying to feed on Bella. (The wages of sin is, after all, death.) The Cullens preach politely, but they try not to be judgmental, and they maintain cordial relations with their non-believing vampire neighbors.

You’ll never find a more Mormon response than that of Bella, Rosalie, and Esme when despite the fact that it would kill her, they insist that Bella carry her baby to term. Although the official stance of the LDS Church (last time I checked) is that abortion is acceptable when the mother’s health is in danger, LDS folklore is replete with stories of mothers who struggle through a life-threatening pregnancy only to survive—or die valiantly. And Bella would have died, too, had Edward not turned her into a vampire.

S
O, ARE THE Cullens an ideal LDS family? Pretty close. In a truly ideal LDS family these days, all the sons go on missions. Though Carlisle served a mission, Edward’s case was somewhat different. Just as Edward reached mission age, he went out killing murderers instead. OK—it’s not the ideal, but the bottom line is that he repented. When Emmett was mission age, he and Rosalie fell madly in love, so they got married; not ideal, but acceptable. (Actually, we’re told they’ve gotten married several times. Alice likes to throw parties, and Rosalie likes to be the center of attention.) Jasper and Alice were already a couple, and maybe already married, when they converted to the family. This is significant to their qualifications as good LDS folk. Because Jasper and Maria had been lovers prior to their conversion, Jasper would not have qualified for a mission anyway.

By the end of the series, everyone has married for “for-ever”—definitely appropriate behavior for the LDS scene. Their loyalty and fidelity are superb. They revere human life, are generous to the poor, and try to spread the “good news” through example and polite discussion. Look at it this way: Carlisle would make an excellent bishop, and Esme, a perfect Relief Society president. Rosalie was born to run a Primary. Emmett would be great leading the Young Men’s athletic program. Alice is perfect as ward activities director. Edward could be the Sunday School president. Jasper would hike the Explorer troop’s feet to the knees, and with all that cooking and housekeeping experience, Bella would excel as Relief Society homemaking teacher. In other words, what we have in the Twilight Saga is not a coven of vampires but the core leadership of the Forks Vampire Branch, Port Angeles Stake.

HAIKU
Cloud tendrill shadows,
Moving. Meadow wildflowers
Flicker like candles

—REBECCA LILLY
Wanna Know What Women Want?
by Tracie Lamb

TRACIE A. LAMB teaches seminary in the morning and ESL in the afternoon. And when she has time, she reads. She lives in Auburn, Washington, with her husband.

I KNEW I NEEDED TO READ STEPHENIE MEYER’S Twilight saga two years ago when we were on vacation in Hawaii. As the sun shone down and the waves lapped the shore, my normally active and outdoorsy, fifteen-year-old daughter and her friend spent much of their time reading. I decided if they could avoid the temptations of paradise to read, I had to know why.

So I read the first three books with my daughter two years ago. Last year before the fourth book came out, I reread them to refresh my memory. Then my daughter and I went to see the movie—twice. When I wanted to see it again, my husband told me if I couldn’t find something better to do with my time, I should go back to work. (But I circled the date for the movie sequel, New Moon, months ago.)

I wanted to figure out why my daughters and I and millions of other females find the saga so compelling, so I performed the unscientific but undoubtedly accurate Tingle Test (you know—butterflies in the stomach, a tingle at the base of the spine). Whenever I felt that “tingle,” I noted it. I discovered that though vampires and werewolves may abound in this saga, this is no horror story. It’s romance, plain and simple.

Though I analyzed the story for my own curiosity, I realized my findings could be invaluable information for the opposite sex. Men and boys, pay attention. Meyer has captured in story form the answer to Freud’s question: What do women want?

INTENSE ATTRACTION

EDWARD IS MESMERIZED by Bella. He loves looking at her even though she is just an ordinary girl. Here are some examples:

Bella says, “I glanced up and he was staring at me.” “He continued to stare at me with obvious curiosity.” “Edward Cullen was . . . staring intently in my direction.” Bella and Edward go to a restaurant, and an attractive waitress flirts conspicuously with him. “She smiled invitingly at him again. ‘You have a nice evening.’ He didn’t look away from me as he thanked her.” Edward tells Bella, “You’re not like anyone I’ve ever known. You fascinate me.” Talk about fascinating womanhood, and she doesn’t even need Saran Wrap.

Edward even watches Bella while she sleeps. When she asks him about it, he says, “I was curious about you.” She asks, “How often did you come here?” “Almost every night,” he answers. “You’re interesting when you sleep.” This is one of the it-could-be-creepy-but-it’s-not parts. When I reread the book more analytically, I realized that a guy sneaking into a girl’s bedroom could seem a little stalker-like. But the first two times I read it, it just seemed flattering. He wants to spend all his time gazing at her. In the cold, hard light of day, it sounds weird, but I’m telling you, men—it’s a turn-on.

RAPT ATTENTION

“CHERISH IS THE word I use to describe . . . “ If you can hum along to that song and remember how those words made you feel, you’re well on your way to understanding the draw of these books. Edward loves looking at Bella, but he’s also interested in what she has to say. My boyfriend in high school wanted to do one thing, and it wasn’t talking. Later in life, as a single mom back on the dating circuit, I found that, unfortunately, men did want to talk—about themselves. I decided if any guy ever acted the least bit interested in hearing about me, I’d marry him. (And I did, but that’s another story.)

Edward wants to know everything about Bella. She says, “He looked fascinated by what I said, for some reason I couldn’t imagine.” “He seemed engrossed in our conversation.” He says, “I do want to know what you’re thinking—everything.” She says, “He questioned me relentlessly about every insignificant detail of my existence.” “I couldn’t remember the last time I’d talked so much . . . But the absolute absorption of his face, and his never-ending stream of questions, compelled me to continue.”

When he gets her alone, all to himself, what do they do?
They talk! This is possibly the most romantic scene in the movie. In a lovely rain forest, they sit on the moss and talk. Mind-blowing erotic! At this point, a woman sitting a few rows ahead of us in the theater turned to the man with her and started making out. Men, you want an aphrodisiac? Here it is. Since the age of free love, I think romance has been underrated. This whole *Sex in the City* thing where people meet-greet-jump-in-bed is a man’s fantasy. Women have blown it by not insisting on the good stuff, the flowers, the cuddles, the *talking*! I’m not saying sex isn’t fun. I’m saying for women, romance is more fun, and sex is even more fun for women with romance. Edward is the romance master, guys. Learn from him.

**STRONG PROTECTION**

**THE DAY THE** movie came out on DVD, a friend I teach seminary with had a movie-watching party. She told me one of the group’s favorite lines was when Edward says to Bella, “I feel very protective of you.” Much of the storyline centers on Edward’s strength and his protection of Bella. The first time she suspects he is more than just a pretty face is when he uses his bare hands to save her from being crushed by a car. Later he races in at the last moment to rescue her from a bunch of drunk jerks. When my older daughter and I watched Edward grab Bella and climb up a tree with her (you just need to see it; it’s too hard to explain), my daughter exclaimed, “He’s so strong!”

All of his strength—throwing trees around and stuff—might impress guys but wouldn’t do anything for women except that it is all directed at protecting Bella. It is all for her. Which demonstrates the last and most significant element of Edward as babe magnet—

**TOTAL DEVOTION**

**WHEN I READ** the books the first time, I told my daughter that I could buy the vampire character, and I was willing to suspend disbelief about the werewolves. The part I had trouble believing was the absolute devotion Edward exhibits toward Bella. But just because I can’t believe it doesn’t mean I don’t want it!

Cue music: “Hopelessly, devoted to you.” My seminary friend says, “Edward’s character is the ultimate devoted partner. His connection to Bella is unquestioned.” He tells her, “You are my life now.” That’s a melt-in-your-shoes-and-drip-down-the-sidewalk line. Other good ones: “I’ll always want you—forever.” “You are the most important thing to me now. The most important thing to me ever.” And he doesn’t just say it. He backs up his words by what he does, by denying himself for her good. When Bella asks him how he was able to keep from sucking her blood, he says, “I’m not sure. It was impossible to stop . . . But I did. I must love you.”

Edward is focused on Bella’s eternal welfare, not on his temporary physical desire. Sound familiar, Sunday School teachers? This self-control is one of Meyer’s most Mormon themes. Some of Edward’s lines could come straight out of advice in *For the Strength of Youth*:

“Bella, I think you should go inside now.” “Mind over matter. If it gets to be too much, I’m fairly sure I’ll be able to leave.” “Let’s get out of here before I do something really stupid.” In the very romantic scene in the forest, they aren’t even touching. They aren’t even touching! If it weren’t too embarrassing for the staid, practical seminary teacher that I am, I would admit to squealing along with my daughters at that part.

As my seminary friend says, “Edward is probably the most selfless leading man we have ever seen in the movies. Most leading men today are on a quest to satisfy a hunger . . . Edward is our first leading man to control it.”

Another friend believes that the vampire threat of danger creates the erotic appeal in the story. “If Edward had all the adoring, protective, and attentive qualities but was just a really sweet, average-looking all-American boy, he’d probably be as equally lovable, but not nearly as irresistible!” She may be right. But what makes my heart thump is his desire for Bella. When my older daughter and I watched Edward joined to his self-control for her good. In the movie, Edward says, “I’ve never wanted a human’s blood so much in my life . . . Your scent is like a drug to me. You’re like my own personal brand of heroin.” And his very best line of all, “You don’t know how long I’ve waited for you.” After the—well, I’ve lost count how many times I’ve watched that scene—it still makes me feel like swooning. So while I agree with my friend that the vampire archetype is alluring, I still think Edward’s devotion is the element that takes this beyond just a popular vampire story and makes it the cultural phenomenon it has become.

So, men, you may be thinking, “But Edward is so handsome!” It would help to be a drop-dead gorgeous hunk, but let’s face it, most of you aren’t. The good news is, you don’t have to be. When a man looks at a woman, he sees the woman. When a woman looks at a man, she sees herself reflected in his eyes. What’s important is not how you look to her, but how you look at her and how you look out for her. It’s how you make her feel: fascinating, cherished, protected. Trust me. Trust Edward. This is what a woman wants. Give it to her, and you’ll both thank us.

DECEMBER 2008
In the World: A Digest of Twilight Reviews
by Dallas Robbins

Dallas Robbins is a freelance writer currently attempting his first novel. Since studying human remains at the University of Utah and receiving a B.S. in anthropology, he has an obsessive fascination for the novel Frankenstein and the gothic author Ann Radcliffe.

“What Girls Want” by Caitlin Flanagan
(auhtor of To Hell with All That and Girl Land)
Atlantic Monthly, December 2008

Caitlin Flanagan begins by stating the obvious—the novel Twilight is “no work of literature, to be sure, no school for style.” But then she gets personal: the story “stirred something in me so long forgotten that I felt embarrassed by it.” That stirring, she explains, is female adolescent desire, which she then explores through the lens of Twilight.

“Twilight books are ostensibly set in the present,” she writes, “but—in terms of the mores, attitudes, and even the central elements of daily life portrayed within them—clearly evoke the culture of the author’s adolescence.” Contrasting it to other YA novels, she points out what Meyer has omitted from her portrayal of current teenage culture—the frequent use of cell phones, texting, and Myspace pages. However, as expected, the element that’s most conspicuous in its absence is sex.

Regarding Meyer’s Mormon background, Flanagan writes, Meyer’s “attitude toward female sexuality—and toward the role of marriage and childbirth—expressed in these novels is entirely consistent with the teachings of [the Mormon] church. In the course of the four books, Bella will be repeatedly tempted—to have sex outside of marriage, to have an abortion as a young married woman, to abandon the responsibilities of a good and faithful mother—and each time, she makes the ‘right’ decision.”

But Meyer doesn’t deal with these moral issues didactically, Flanagan writes; Meyer is “more concerned with questions of romance and supernatural beings than with instructing young readers how to lead their lives.” Because Meyer makes the moral questions essential to the character development and story, Flanagan acknowledges, “what is interesting is how deeply fascinated young girls, some of them extremely bright and ambitious, are by the questions the book poses, and by the solutions their heroine chooses.”

The reason the Twilight series “so resonates with girls [is] because it perfectly encapsulates the giddiness and the rapture—and the menace—that inherently accompany romance and sex for them.”

The “Twilight series is not based on a true story, of course, but within it is the true story, the original one. Twilight centers on a boy who loves a girl so much that he refuses to defile her, and on a girl who loves him so dearly that she is desperate for him to do just that, even if the wages of the act are expulsion from her family and from everything she has ever known. We haven’t seen that tale in a girls’ book in a very long time.”

This myth continues in Flanagan’s explanation of Edward Cullen who “puts the young girl into a state of emotional confusion and vulnerability that has been at the heart of female romantic awakening since the beginning of time.”

This tension between sex and longing, restraint and desire, propels the novel into the imaginations of young girls everywhere. “This is a vampire novel, so it is a novel about sex, but no writer, from Bram Stoker on, has captured so precisely what sex and longing really mean to a young girl.”

In conclusion, Flanagan states, “the books constitute a thousand-page treatise on the art of foreplay,” where “this is sex and romance fully—ecstatically, dangerously—engaged with each other.”

“The Beautiful Undead” by Jenny Turner
(author of the novel The Brainstorm)
London Review of Books, 26 March 2009

On the release of the film Twilight and the novel Breaking Dawn, Jenny Turner reviewed both in one of the premier British periodicals of criticism, the London Review of Books. She begins with a typical summary, pointing out flaws in the film and casting a critical eye on Stephenie Meyer’s writing, but then she attempts to make sense of its popularity. Eventually she mentions Meyer’s Mormon background: “No stimulants save the odd Diet Wild Cherry Pepsi, no R-rated movies—and therefore very much against even sexy thoughts and feelings outside the celestial marriage bond.”

Turner first points out, “It’s not that the books read like Mormon propaganda exactly: the Bellaverse is a bit like Middle Earth or Narnia, in that God is left well out of it.” But Turner finds that “religion bulges out in unacknowledged places—in the interest in immortality and eternal bonding, sects, and the very odd and uninformed fascination with ‘addiction’ and ‘obsession,’ among other forbidden things—and, above all, in the centrality of ‘abstaining’.”

Turner contrasts the sexuality of Twilight with the attitude of the TV series Buffy the Vampire Slayer, where chastity is brought up only as a topic for blunt satire. Twilight, however, carries a tension between repression and titillation. They “don’t work in opposition: the two of them like to hang together, thieving from your pockets while you’re still figuring out these arousing, bewildering images, what exactly they are for, and what, exactly, they are telling you to do.”

Turner states that a decade after Buffy, teen chastity is “stronger than ever,” and the Twilight universe it’s the “most moral and the most erotic position to take, the practice that brings the human closest to the god,” referring to Bella and Edward respectively.

Turner concludes that Twilight mines from the same vampire mythos that writers have used for years—the struggle
against the body and death in the face of beautiful immortal
bloodsuckers.

After watching the film, Turner says, “I found myself feeling
wretched, in a way I really haven’t for years and years and
years. Why can’t I be freed from the need for food and sleep,
why can’t I squirm exquisitely in skinny trousers, why can’t I
be forever beautiful and young? Awful memories were dis-
lodged, of being young and full of longing—a really horrible
feeling, a sickening excess of emotion with nowhere, quite to
put it. ‘I wish I could be a vampire,’ I actually said out loud at
one point, though once I’d said it, I knew even that didn’t get
to the heart of the problem.”

She remembers a scene in Breaking Dawn, in which Bella
dreams of seeing her aging self in a mirror, “That was me. Me in
a mirror. Me ancient, creased, withered. Edward stood beside
me, casting no reflection, excruciatingly lovely and forever 17.”

“It’s Dorian Gray, of course,” Turner concludes, “but it is
also a brilliant, terrifying observation about what it is to be
mortal and aging in the world of ‘magazines’ and ‘old masters,’
to feel your body judged and found lacking, to know the situ-
ation is irremediable. The horror of this may not always be no-
ticed by the teenagers who are Twilight’s designated audience.
But the Twilight Moms most likely feel it deeply, and like to
make a great big noise, as a way of hiding from the fear of it,
the disappointment and the shame.”

Economic Light in the Downpour
(Even Though It Doesn’t
Rain as Much as Those
Books Say It Does)
by Janet Garrard-Willis

JANET GARRARD-WILLIS holds an under-
graduate English degree from BYU and an M.A. from Saint Louis
University, where her Ph.D. is forthcoming. She’s published here and
there and currently serves as a permablogger at Feminist Mormon
Housewives.

WHAT, DID YOU GROW UP ON A BOAT?”
Snort snort. That sort of comedic tripe oft used to
follow the announcement that I hailed from the
Olympic Peninsula, two hours west of Seattle. But no longer
do such cartographic difficulties beset me: If the person with
whom I am making small talk cannot place “Olympic
Peninsula” on her internal map, I just sigh and say, “Port
Angeles, near Forks.” More often than not, near hysteria and
instant popularity ensue.

Yep, in this tiny way, Stephenie Meyer has made my life a
wee bit more convenient. The blinding spotlight her fiction
has shone into the drizzly fog of my home stomping grounds
has wreaked marked repercussions.

Port Angeles hasn’t been as affected as Forks, the town
where Bella, Edward, and Jacob play out their melodramatic
love triangle. But Neil Conklin who owns Bella Italia (the
restaurant where Ed and Bella have their first date), who
taught me how to cook back in my pre-mission days, recently
reported that in the past year he’s sold 4,500 bowls of the
mushroom ravioli Bella consumes in the first book. Last time I
was there, the place was bustling at the seams with prom
dresses and tuxes (want to place a bet which half of the cou-
ples chose the restaurant?), and hubby and I couldn’t get a
table. We couldn’t even stop by the kitchen to tell Neil hello.

Forks, on the other hand, has more or less experienced a
kind of pre-millennial resurrection. About 15 B.T. (Before
Twilight), when I was in high school, I would go to Forks to see
my friend Jolene, passing the proud sign proudly proclaiming
“FORKS: Logging Capital of the World.” For a long time, I
guess it was.

Then the Nineties saw the discovery of the spotted owl and
the subsequent (and much needed) cessation of clear-cut
timber practices. Forks’ local Mike Daniels notes that the resi-
dents would still like the old reputation, but “it’s not there any-
more, the logging’s gone.”

When I was a kid, I knew lots of loggers. Now I can’t name
one. Since my schoolmates and I graduated from high school
and fled that little corner of the world, Forks has been slowly
dying. My return camping trips have been a bit like bringing
flowers in the form of paltry cash—20 bucks at the market, a
campground fee, a few dollars for the museum donation jar,
and I’m gone for another couple of years.

The last few times I camped near Forks, I felt as if I were vis-
iting a ghost town—I’d walk the beaches out near the rez (no
werewolves, thank you) or stroll through the Hoh Rain Forest,
and the place would be largely mine: the drizzle, the sea stacks,
the moss, the raucous birds. The folks there knew each other so
well that they immediately knew I wasn’t local, and twice a
market cashier offered me a couch to sleep on. After assuring
him I was just from Port Angeles, I pulled my car into an empty
campground and slept in the back seat.

And then presto, Stephenie Meyer sits in sunny Phoenix,
pops out Google, and types in “Hey, where is it overcast and
rains a lot?” She doesn’t even bother to visit, a fact which
continues to irritate the hell out of me. Then a book gets
published, but at first nothing happens. Then a Twilight fan
from Vancouver visits Forks and realizes that nobody there
has made much ado about Stephenie Meyer (insert maniacal
chuckle here). She sets the locals’ eyes rolling by opening
up the “Dazzled by Twilight” shop, chock full of Twilight
paraphernalia. Believe me, ain’t nobody’s eyes rolling now.

May God and the local economy bless Ms. Meyer and that
Vancouver transplant, because now even the locksmith sells
Twilight memorabilia, and every single hotel in town has a
room devoted—ironically, don’t cha know—to the immortal
love of the premaritally chaste Bella and Edward. Hotel rev-
enue went up 26% in the last year alone, and Charlene Lepell,
who once nearly closed her gift and flower shop, now can’t
even find time to vacation since she devoted the space to
Twilight-themed giftage.

Forks used to see about 6,000 visitors a year, tops. Now, on
ORKS RESIDENTS REMAIN deeply proud of their timber heritage. They even built a logging museum that has always impressed me, a person not constitutionally inclined toward a cheer of, “Logging, logging, rah rah rah!” While general tourism has skyrocketed, attendance at the logging museum has markedly dropped. Nobody visits Forks to see Forks, it would seem—they visit to see the backdrop to their fantasies. Why look at wood when there's sparkly marble skin to be sought?

Furthermore, I sense echoes of Venice. Forks itself boasts a total population of just over 3,000. This means that the majority of people in town at any given moment aren’t actually locals—Forks is no longer made up, by and large, by Forks. It’s Forks cum Twilighters. I have a hard time imagining the salt o’ the earth men and women of my childhood seamlessly dovetailing with a bunch of people who have enough superfluous time and money to fly across the country (or world) to visit the setting of some chick-lit blockbuster. We’re talking about a small town proud of earning its bread by hard, physical labor, not by pandering or playing tour guide. I wonder if it hurts them at all. I wonder if my ruminations constitute equally dreadful patronization of its own sort. I guess I really don’t know. Still, I wonder.

And then there’s that moss-draped forest about which Ms. Meyer makes much ado. She captures it about as well as anyone could who hadn’t been there. It’s amazing, lush, the sort of place one might expect something supernatural and magical to happen. And there's MOSS, MOSS, MOSS! I have a photograph of moss growing on top of a phone booth at the visitor's center. Who knew so many colors of green could exist just in moss? You quite expect hobbits or fairies to jaunt nonchalantly from the tree knobbies. Reported, the Hoh Rain Forest contains the quietest place in the United States—a space known as “the one square inch.”

So, on the one hand, it’s nice to have people know about the Olympic Peninsula’s sock-knocking beauty. On the other, that very knowledge threatens to trample the rough charm that led people such as Raymond Carver or my parents to settle there out in the first place.

While I want people to witness natural beauty, even if they only stumble upon it accidentally while vacuously looking for vampires, I also desperately want to protect that beauty from casual destruction. If the hordes of visitors driving to Forks cannot see the rain forest as anything other than a fanciful backdrop, then the snob in me isn’t sure their patronage is worth the risk to a fragile ecosystem.

The conundrum of “Yay, it’s about time you people realized that the thumb of land seemingly trying to hitch-hike up to Alaska was worthy of attention” and “Aaack, aaack, stay away! Don’t you dare stomp upon my all-precious moss! Go the freak back to Los Angeles!” looms large. I want the people of Forks to earn their wages and feed their kids and do it with dignity. And if that means life-size cut-outs of Bella Swan, then three cheers for them. They’ve handled the attention with the sort of grace and humor of which anyone should be proud.

I read the Twilight books for the literary junk food they are and can list their ideological problems, chapter and verse. But that’s not all there is to the story, so to speak. All that pant pant, crisis, swoon swoon, crisis, saved a town. So kudos to Steph for that.

But, Twilight fans? Respect the moss, or someone will eat you.
VAMPIRES, MORMONS, AND BLOGS

Compiled by Emily Jensen

“What rests beneath the incessant appeal of Meyer’s world? Estrogen?”
POSTED BY ERIC RUSSELL, motleyvision.org

“One might object that vampires, murderous, ruthless, blood-crazed monsters, could never represent perfect immortal beings, or that it would be beyond tasteless to make the attempt. But why not?”
POSTED BY JONATHAN GREEN, timesandseasons.org

“Edward has very conservative beliefs about sex. His father Carlisle has an unwavering reverence for the sanctity of life, and his mother Esme about the importance of keeping her family together. Sounds pretty Mormon to me.”
POSTED BY “PARADOX,” templeboundparadox.blogspot.com

“What My Opinion of Twilight does not Mean
• That I think you are stupid
• That I think your daughter is stupid
• That I think you have bad taste in books
• That I am cold and dead inside
• That Edward should suck my blood so that I can understand the depths of his beautiful soul
POSTED BY “SUE,” mormonmommywars.com

“What My Opinion of Twilight does Mean
• That a lot of people will find my blog by Google searching ‘Twilight Sucks’
• That I will get a ton of Twilight oriented email, some pro, some con, and I will think about answering it, but then I will probably just answer it with the power of my mind, which is to say, I won’t really answer it.”
POSTED BY “PARADOX,” templeboundparadox.blogspot.com

“It has got to be strange for the millions of Meyer’s readers that her characters aren’t hopping into bed left and right. But she makes up for it with paragraph after paragraph of titillating hints and passion without limits—that are to come after Edward and Bella can finally consummate their union.”
POSTED BY “GEOFF B,” millennialstar.org

“Bella’s ‘Plan A’ in life is to have her lover/vampire make her immortal and give her a perfect body so that she can leave her broken home and join his immortal (read: eternal), rich family. ‘Plan B’ is to go to college.”
POSTED BY “NATALIE B,” timesandseasons.org

“Yes, I read it. Yes, I enjoyed it. Yes, I had issues with it. If you want to chat with me about it, well then, by all means, continue.” (79 comments followed.)
POSTED BY “THE WIZ,” mormonmommywars.com
WHAT’S FEMINISM GOT TO DO WITH IT?

A smattering of thoughts on Twilight from FeministMormonHousewives.com

Feminism has something to do with it because Bella is such a passive character, willing to give up her life/self/personality (not that she was written with much of one) for the attentions and affections of a boy. Blech.

RACHAEL HODSON

This book reinforces some terrible ideas:
1. You don't need to really develop yourself as a woman, you just need an intelligent, interesting, handsome guy to love you.
2. Getting married at the age of 19 is a great idea, if he really loves you.
3. You can get whatever you want as long as you will it hard enough—the rules don't apply to you, they apply to everyone else. You're special.

KORY BOOHER

So what if Bella makes her choices because of a boy? Why is love not a valid reason upon which to base some of our life choices? I absolutely don't get that backlash at all.

JENNIFER SAULS

There are some people who are a little whacked out by it . . . dreams, naming their children “Edward” and “Bella,” T-shirts, etc. But who am I to judge? Read it if you want to, but don’t be so judgy of others because they like it. They probably think you are boring with all your uppity pro-woman stuff.

KATIE KILPATRICK

I've read them all . . . enjoyed them . . . and now I'm getting rid of all of them. I'm feeling more annoyed at the annoying parts (Renesmee? Really?) and less enamored of the thrilling parts, the farther I get from the actual experience of reading the books.

But hey, thanks for asking. I'm so glad to read/talk about something that's not Prop 8!

ANA SHAW

The Twilight Series is to Great Literature as Spaghetti-O's are to fine Italian food. You know Spaghetti-O's are overly sweet, meant for a much younger eater, and will only keep you full for a minute. But, dang, sometimes I've eaten them cold, straight out of the can.

“CHERCHER”

Why is it that the vampire father figure, Carlisle, has used his immortality to accrue oodles of knowledge and life-saving skills and become this phenomenal person, whereas the mother vampire figure has used hers to no apparent end at all? She doesn't do volunteer work. She doesn't play the piano. She doesn't appear to read. She doesn't spend her time mothering. All she does is hover about looking pretty and concerned. It's almost as though Stephanie Meyer can configure no thought of what a married woman might do with immortality besides become a figurehead.

JANET GARRARD–WILLIS

Bella is just the average girl with not much going for her (except Edward). Unfortunately, I think this is exactly why girls love this book so much. So how do you start a dialogue with a teen girl about the dangerous aspects of the book without sounding like an uppity pro-feminist adult? Any attack on Bella is going to come across as an attack on the girl who identifies with her.

NICOLE SWENSON

WHAT DID YOU LIKE OF TWILIGHT?

Liked it. I'm feminist.

Like it. I'm Mormon.

Liked it. I'm feminist and Mormon.

Didn't like it. I'm feminist.

Didn't like it. I'm Mormon.

Didn't like it. I'm feminist and Mormon.

Didn't like it. I'm neither feminist nor Mormon.

Originating post authored by “Artemis”
My 13-year-old daughter just started reading the first book yesterday afternoon. At this exact moment, she is on Chapter 26. Her evaluation: “This book is awesome! I could read it over and over again.” (She doesn’t read books multiple times—not even Harry Potter when she was devouring them.) She doesn’t think I would like it, because, “It’s too girly.”

CURTIS RAY DEGRAW

Bruised body, broken headboard, and torn lingerie after sex? And then begging for more? I know they were married. I know Edward was powerful and could not control himself. I do not care. I have sat at my desk listening to men sob because they felt horrible after beating up their wives. I have seen women countless times forgive their husbands because, “He couldn’t help it. I made him mad!” No good, no good. I am a very liberal person in what I read, but this is not okay by my book. I would not want my daughter thinking that this was okay, vampire or not.

MAREN ALITAGTAG

Is it antithetical to feminism to portray a female protagonist who enjoys, ah . . . robust sex? Can women have such a preference, or is that merely the cultural indoctrination of a patriarchy; and are such representations in literature merely part of that indoctrination? Should good feminist literature only have characters who enjoy gentle and tender love?

DEREK STAFFANSON

They’re fluff. And if fluff gets people reading who otherwise would be watching TV, then I’m all for fluff. It’s like how I didn’t like mushrooms when I was a kid; then as a teen I tasted some really fattening stuffed mushrooms that were really good. Now I enjoy mushrooms. The fluff books are a stepping stone to less fluffy reading material.

ALICE ROBERTS

I find the message to young girls disturbing. That love is an irresistible force that precludes making any rational decisions. That it’s OK (even noble) to sacrifice your personal safety if you really love someone. That it’s sweet for a guy to stalk you and watch you while you sleep without your knowledge (because he’s really hot and has chiseled abs!).

CHELSEA GRIFFITH WATTS

There are certain things that worry me:

A. Edward tells Bella they can’t have sex because he’s afraid he will kill her. If a boyfriend said that to me, I think I’d stay away from him. Or maybe get a restraining order.

B. When they do have sex, and Bella is a bruised all over and pregnant, Edward immediately tries to arrange an abortion for her. Of course, he only does this because he loves her and is concerned for her, blah blah blah, but way to not take into account the woman’s freedom of choice, Edward! Way to show ownership of her uterus!

C. Bella’s father congratulated Jacob when he made sexual advances without her consent.

HILARY BROWN

I haven’t read the books, never will. I have never seen Titanic either. ’Cause I am uppity like that.

“JO IN UTAH”
LAST SUMMER, AS I FLIPPED THROUGH THE five-hundred-plus-page novel my wife and I had borrowed from our sister-in-law, I thought, “A Mormon writing vampire stories? This should be an interesting read.” Almost everyone we’d talked to about the book and its sequels—Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* Saga—had nothing but praise for Meyer, a BYU graduate, and her flawed-enough-to-be-human fantasy. Some said, “It’s brilliant! Stephenie Meyer is a great storyteller.” Others remarked, in words similar to these from one Twihard (as some obsessive fans call themselves), “These books really make you feel like they’re happening[,] they’re realistic—love happens. And that makes them even more likeable, too.”

But the draw to Meyer’s world may not simply be likeable characters. The stories also seem narcotic in that they evoke a physiological response that ties readers to the sensual experience of the fantasy. “I feel a little lost now that the series is over and I have nothing left to read,” writes one Twihard. “Nothing else interests me except for Bella and Edward[,]s story.” Yet another confesses, “*Twilight* is my brand of heroin. The first time I read it, I fell in love with the book [...] I became obsessed [...] It’s definitely addicting.”

I could go on quoting similar comments from any number of websites I’ve come across in my efforts to understand the *Twilight* phenomenon. But I need look no farther than my own household to observe the gravitational pull of Meyer’s world. We were latecomers to Meyer’s reception, walking in only after *Breaking Dawn* had come out in 2008. But once my wife picked up the series, there was no looking back. She ingested all four books in five days. Then, after a day or two of rest, during which she couldn’t shake the specters of Edward and Bella from her consciousness, she went back for seconds, this time reading the series more slowly, she said, in preparation for the November 2008 release of the film adaptation of the first book.

Because Meyer’s romantic epic sprawls across 2,458 pages in four roughly six-hundred page tomes, my wife’s reading was no small feat. But as many others have, she admits she just couldn’t put the books down. She just had to follow Isabella “Bella” Swan and her vegetarian vampire beau, Edward Cullen, as they first meet in Forks, Washington, fall into forbidden love, and, after conquering a series of increasingly threatening obstacles—most of which involve confrontations with vampires of the non-vegan stripe—live happily ever after as immortal husband and wife. My wife and I are active Latter-day Saints, so surely the prospect of seeing Edward and Bella become eternal companions increased my wife’s motivation to keep reading. Such a Mormon ideal, as Jonathan Green points out, makes the Saga—particularly *Breaking Dawn*—“a sustained and vividly imagined answer” to some “very Mormon questions,” including: “What will it be like to have a marriage continue past death into the
eternities? What does it mean to have a perfected body, or to love an eternal being?4

Despite this apparently unabashed Mormon cosmology and the implicit cultural approval of the fantasy, I was still a bit chagrined at the LDS-vampire combo as I waded into Twilight's cinematic narrative. Considering the book's black cover, I may have even asked myself, “What might this brush with the dark and ungodly realm of vampires do to my soul? Am I giving way to the devil by wading into Meyer's world?”

Well, one critic writes, Meyer's “novels are truly Mormon novels and could not be anything else”—so surely they're safe reading. But a number of Latter-day Saints believe otherwise.

In an assembly of letters to the Meridian Magazine editor in response to the magazine's positive treatment of the Twilight Saga, several readers wonder how Mormons, “the [self-avowed] children of [...] Light,”9 can justifiably indulge themselves by reading literary works situated in supernatural realms of darkness and touching the inherent sensuality of human experience. How have so many Latter-day Saints, “the very Elect” of God, one asks, “been hood winked [sic] and dazzled by the Adversary” into thinking that Twilight and its sequels are “harmless” entertainment?7 For despite Twilight's squeaky clean façade, the story seethes with what Lev Grossman names an “erotics of abstinence”: a muted sexual interplay that arises as Bella's hormones and Edward's bloodlust repeatedly interact and their bodies ache to possess one another, often to the point of arousal, though never to climax until after their marriage in Breaking Dawn.8

In view of LDS teachings on chastity, Meyer's answer to the question, How far can we go without going all the way? may pose valid concerns for those worried about the morality of Mormon youth and Meyer's possible influence on their attitudes toward sexuality. So even if readers don't understand the historical literary connection between vampirism, sensuality, and sex (as many do not), this tension between a hygienic surface and an implicitly “dirty” core leads one letter writer to ask why Mormon readers insist on “gloriz[ing]” and “splitting hairs with evil” by giving Twilight due consideration. For as the writer sermonizes, “The Savior does not split hairs[;] wrong is wrong, evil is evil. Dress it up or slice it any way you want to [...], the Prophets of the Lord [...] are contrary to Ms. Meyer[’]s story lines [sic].”9

In my efforts to understand and interpret the Twilight Saga as a cultural phenomenon, I've found it useful to situate Twilight in relation to Gothic literature, that increasingly popular fictional realm sometimes labeled “a literature of nightmare.”10 The first Gothic novel I read was Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), inspired by her vision of a scientist crazed by a desire to re-animate human life. It's a tale that has settled into our cultural consciousness deeply enough that its potential to strike terror into our hearts—as it did to Shelley and her contemporaries—is muted by familiarity and parody. Some time after reading Frankenstein, I returned to the tradition's roots with Horace Walpole's dream-inspired, Castle of Otranto (1764), considered the first Gothic novel in English. Otranto set the generic standard with its haggard castle, animated portraits, unexplained appearances of colossal body parts, twists of identity, and a crazed and incestuous father-king whose lust for power brings death crashing down on his son, ultimately leaving him personally and politically impotent. Then I read William Beckford's Vathek, an Arabian Tale (1782), Matthew Lewis's The Monk (1796), Anne
Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797), and—probably the most well-known of this list—Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), a tale of passionate yet thwarted love between Catherine and Heathcliff (one of literature’s great monsters). The book’s characters haunt England’s Yorkshire Moors, drifting between the natural and supernatural in their longing, perhaps, to belong.

Something these novels have in common is that, true to the Gothic tradition, they give “form to amorphous fears and impulses common” to humanity. They take up psychological and relational dysfunctions, the depths of passion, and the pain of unrequited love as they conjure up monsters—animated corpses, mad monks, and demons—and invoke venues—the “forbidding cliffs and glowering buildings, stormy seas and the dizzying abyss”—that are significant not just in narrative terms, but contain “the properties of dream symbolism as well.”¹¹ Consciously or not, Gothic fiction writers give shape to phantasms and evils we generally summon only from our sleep’s deep unconsciousness. These stories spark to life—or un-death, as the case may be—repressed or forgotten bits of ourselves that can sometimes frighten us out of our wits and disorient our self-perceptions because, yes, we’ve seen these faces before, lurking in dark corners of our mind.

Freud opens the way to analyze the place of evil and terror in the human mind with “The ‘Uncanny,’” which literary scholar Steven Bruhm calls “one of the most important early essays to influence criticism of the Gothic.”¹² As Freud explains, an experience with the uncanny is a brush with an object, image, person, or idea that is both “familiar and agreeable” and “kept out of sight”—as when we watch the sins of Dorian Gray distort his portrait, or feel in our bones the crumbling of the House of Usher beneath a burden of vanity, or as wife after Stepford wife is murdered and replaced by an impossibly beautiful and fawning replica because Stepford insists on perfection. So when we come upon something uncanny, it shows us “nothing new or alien”; it simply reasserts something from which we have “become alienated [...] through a process of repression.”¹⁴

The uncanny comes from a source close to home—much closer, perhaps, than some might care to admit. It stands on the threshold between the unfamiliar and familiar, the imagined and the real. This in-between-ness allows the uncanny to subversively function in psychology, language, literature, culture, and religion, the systems through which humans mediate the immaterial and material aspects of the world.

The uncanny stands on the threshold between the unfamiliar and familiar, the imagined and the real.
In Gothic fiction, this repressed familiarity is frequently manifest in the classic monster—the vampire, werewolf, mad scientist, or ghost-beings neither dead nor alive, human nor animal, sane nor completely clinical. Barbara Creed suggests that the uncanny “permeates” these monstrosities, making it difficult for readers to dismiss them, because they’re not just “meaningless beast[s]” meant to “run amok, incite terror, kill indiscriminately.” No, she continues, “the identity of the monster [...] is inseparable from questions of sex, gender, power, and politics.”

In other words, we sometimes see ourselves in these grotesqueries—in Frankenstein’s monster’s longing for, and later rejection of, love and family; in Manfred’s destructive lust for power and success in The Castle of Otranto; in Heathcliff’s passion for Catherine, which turns into emotional violence toward everyone after she marries another man.

By nudging us into identifying with these monsters, by exciting our pity or terror, Gothic fiction authors subtly confront us with questions about who we are and persuade us to step beyond our ambivalence and anxiety in order to expose and explore the recesses of our minds and unsettle our embedded assumptions. All this nudging makes space in which to expand awareness of our personal, social, and rhetorical worlds.

In the Twilight novels, Edward initially stands as the uncanny monster. He inhabits the gray area of being a principled vampire, an angelic monster who sends textual and extratextual females reeling with a mere nod of the head. (Cue screaming Twihards.) Like her literary predecessor Mary Shelley, Meyer first encountered this monster in a dream. His “fantastically beautiful, sparkling” body sparked her dash to publication. Edward catches and keeps Bella’s fascination from her “first sight” of the Cullens in the Forks high school cafeteria. As an outsider, he evokes Bella’s—and many a Twihard’s—“pity” and passion. And with their unique blend of burning, yet restrained, lust for blood, Edward and his coven, marble skin ablaze, have stepped from the shadows of vampire mythology into the cultural limelight to draw attention to Meyer’s reworking of the Gothic tradition. This reworking offers a much more nuanced reading of vampirism than the usual products of pop culture channels.

Though caught in the riptide of popular culture, Meyer and coven stand apart from the zeitgeist, the vampires as a function of their distinctively moral monstrosity and the author as a function of her faith.

But that is easier said than shown. As Caitlin Flanagan writes, Stephanie Meyer’s Mormonness is something “every reviewer of [Meyer’s work] has mentioned,” though none has really known “what to do with it.” Well, that’s not true anymore. In his master’s thesis, Edwin Arnaudin ferrets out several Mormon tenets, including agency, marriage and family, and chastity, as they arise in the series. He argues that these were layered into the narrative in an effort to “foster [...] greater religious awareness in popular culture” and lure potential initiates into the mysteries of Mormonism. He warns readers to engage Meyer’s fictions carefully lest, “uninformed” as to what they’re “actually receiving” (i.e. Mormonism “cloaked” in a clever vampire tale), they fall down “the rabbit hole” of her faith. Thus, when he concludes that her “novels are truly Mormon novels and could not be anything else,” he is not praising her for being true to her faith. He’s arguing that Meyer’s vampires and their fans are being pulled toward Mormonism, even as worried Meridian Magazine readers lament that Twilight is pulling their children and Mormonism toward darkness and the devil.

The uncanniness of Meyer’s world thus spills over into the varied reactions to Twilight—from praise for her creatures’ virtues to condemnation of her monsters’ sensuality, from accolades for a story well-told to Arnaudin’s fears that Meyer means to cram her beliefs down the world’s unsuspecting throats.

But these reactions miss the point—they’re too literal. They’re refusing to let the uncanny do what it does best: place us in an area where we can withhold judgment as the story moves us to confront the many-faceted issues of physical desire and the nature of the “evil” that flows beneath our consciousness. By learning to dwell nonjudgmentally with such moral terrors, we become better able, as Edmund Burke suggests in his treatise on the sublime and the beautiful, to “enter into the concerns of others”; to be “moved as they are moved.” In other words, readers of the uncanny aren’t indifferent spectators; no, they are vicariously soaking in and empathizing with a fellow being’s pains, afflictions, temptations, sicknesses, infirmities, and sins, a small reflection of an infinite act once carried out in a garden called Gethsemane.

If in our ventures toward eternity, we deny ourselves the vitality of such vicarious experience by refusing the uncanny a place in our personal and cultural theologies—especially as this refusal relates to gaining (or not) an un-
understanding of sexuality, sin, and evil—we may miss the soul-expansion that can arise from a brush with alternate, rhetorical, even terror-ridden and ungodly, lives. And through her rearticulation of the Gothic aesthetic, Stephenie Meyer summons us into this revisionary reading of terror and the ungodly. That is, by coaxing the vampire novel into the light, she gives readers the opportunity to confront and come to terms with the implicit humanness of the uncanny as they grow into a fullness of knowledge, compassion, and community.

NOTES

9. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
BOOK REVIEW

JOB WITH FANGS

ANGEL FALLING SOFTLY
by Eugene Woodbury
2008
224 Pages, $15.95
Zarahemla Books

Reviewed by Nathan Shumate

The only way to write a Mormon supernatural novel is to skew the balance in favor either of the fantastic or of the faithful.

HARDCORE SECULARISTS MAY lump religion and supernatural superstition into a single category, but producing a Mormon novel with supernatural themes is surprisingly difficult. The problem may lie in the fact that those secularists are right: in LDS tradition, the supernatural is the religious—but only when it has a clear tie-in to our theology. We acknowledge departed souls, angelic manifestations, and demonic influences because all have a clear foundation in our doctrine. Such spiritual (and thus supernatural) visitations are assumed to have direct theological import and their activities to be directed by heaven or hell. However, other beasties—goblins, werewolves, and the inevitable vampires—have no real place in the Mormon worldview, whose beginnings are in the post-Enlightenment Western world. Unlike the medieval Catholic tradition and its Protestant breakaways, Mormons have no extensive body of folk doctrine that shoehorns preexisting mythologies into orthopraxy.

To make matters worse (for the prospective writer of Mormon supernatural fiction, not for the Saints at large), we have a trump card: the priesthood. If one is writing fiction which assumes that LDS doctrine is valid, then just about every tale involving the supernatural would end with a worthy and faithful priesthood holder raising his arm to the square and banishing the things that go bump in the night.

The only way to write a Mormon supernatural novel, then, is to skew the balance either in favor of the fantastic or of the faithful. Stephenie Meyer's Twilight novels show one way to set that balance. While the national media can't keep from mentioning Meyer's religion in every article they write—and a number have claimed to see a distinctly Mormon worldview in her books—nothing in the books would lead the reader to believe that they're set in a "Mormon universe," i.e., in a milieu in which LDS theology is assumed to be valid. Meyer's books are no more distinctly Mormon in content (nor a stalking horse for Mormon indoctrination, as some have claimed) than is Orson Scott Card's mass-market fiction.

The other way to set the balance is what Eugene Woodbury attempts in Angel Falling Softly, which places vampires in a Mormon setting but strips out practically all of the distinctly supernatural elements of the vampire myth. Supernature becomes nature; superstition becomes cultural baggage attached to a blood-borne viral contagion. And the stark contrast between good and evil common to stories of overt supernatural forces becomes the moral and ethical gray area of the dramatic novel.

MILADA Daranyi, born four hundred years ago in what is now Hungary, is a stunning, near-albino who looks about twenty. She lives in New York, the headquarters from which she and her adoptive father, along with her two sisters, devote themselves to that most vampiric of pursuits: high-stakes commerce. Daranyi International has made an art of acquiring small high-tech firms, and the latest target is in Salt Lake City.

Rachel Forsythe is a dutiful Mormon mother, the wife of a young bishop in the south Salt Lake Valley suburbs. Her younger daughter Jennifer has been comatose for six months, a victim of cancer treatment gone awry; the bone marrow transplant she received from her mother is being attacked by her alloimmune responses, also unfortunately inherited from Rachel. And the vacant house next door has just been rented by Milada Daranyi, who plans on staying in town for a couple of months until the takeover is complete.

With that setup, readers know to expect the culture shock of a sophisticated urbanite entering Mormonland. Milada exhibits arched-eyebrow amusement at the suburban life around her, the attempts by Mormon neighbors to draw her into a community life of backyard barbecues, and most especially at the earnest, single elders quorum president who sounds her out as both a potential convert and paramour.

If you've seen many iterations and interpretations of the vampire myth, you expect the check-off list of which traditional vampire attributes are valid in this story. In this case, vampires can go out in the sun, but they burn very severely, very easily. They can and do eat normal food. They need to feed on blood every couple of weeks, but only a pint or two. They can tranquillize their victims with an oral venom: Blood is best ingested from a "donor" in a state of current or recent sexual arousal. This being a secular version of the vampire myth, crosses and
garlic don’t even come into play.

What you may not expect is how much of the story the corporate takeover occupies. I must confess, few things bore me like finance, so the many chapters which detail the machinations of manipulating stock prices and restructuring corporate entities strike me as tedious. More to the point, they seem like an attenuated subplot, adding little substance or depth to the main story which is the odd relationship between Milada and Rachel.

In much the same way that a Mormon treatment of the supernatural ends up dealing with matters of theology, a dramatic narrative that is inherently Mormon (in contrast to being a generic story with Utah locations) ends up dealing with philosophical questions of doctrinal or moral import. Here, the conflict that wracks Rachel is second only to the classic question of theodicy: Can one do a “bad” thing for a “good” reason?

Rachel discovers through happenstance that Milada’s venom has the side effect of suppressing allergic responses. So Milada could possibly be the key to reversing the alloimmune reaction ravaging Jennifer’s body. If heaven appears to have ignored Rachel’s entreaties in so obviously good a cause as saving the life of an innocent child, is she justified in stepping outside the comforting rules of the faith and allying herself with parties who could very well be the definition of evil? Could it be, in fact, that the Lord sent this amoral agent on his errand, “shaving with a razor that is hired” (Isaiah 7:20), as it were? (That scripture isn’t cited in the book, but many others are. Rachel demonstrates a familiarity with the Bible that we all wish our bishops’ wives—not to mention our bishops—exhibited, and Milada was raised in a Catholic orphanage. I don’t think anyone is surprised that, in a story about terrible suffering without any apparent purpose, Job is mentioned quite frequently. Scriptures here are not so much a source of comfort or reassurance as they are culturally familiar ways to phrase discussions of those troubling, eternal questions about human suffering.)

The heady stuff of eternal import is muted, however, by the story’s having jettisoned the supernatural (and thus infernal) explanation for vampirism. Milada is the centuries-old carrier of a virus, not one of Satan’s minions, and while she’s neither righteous by Mormon standards nor the nicest person on Wall Street, she’s certainly not the definition of evil. Once it’s clear that Rachel’s choice is not a question of accomplishing good by a normally evil act (as in such scriptural precedents as Nephi’s cutting off Laban’s head) the ethical question loses steam. It instead becomes a matter of Rachel’s agonizing over hanging her hopes on something completely outside her experience—which can be a compelling dramatic hook, but it doesn’t stand up to the nigh-apocalyptic drama one expects when vampirism is part of the plot summary.

Perhaps one problem is that despite spending more than half the book from her viewpoint, I never got a good read on Milada’s character. That’s not to say that I wouldn’t have expected a sardonic and world-weary vampire to wear her heart on her sleeve after centuries of concealment and subterfuge. Yet even though her actions and decisions are at least as important to the dramatic tension as Rachels, I still never felt I knew Milada. Some readers might consider that to be evidence of her personality’s complexity; to me, she simply seemed vague. Who, after four centuries of beautiful immortality, would spend her time poring over SEC filings?

In its focusing on difficult questions of morality and suffering rather than on blood or sex, and with its deliberate diction that is always precise and sometimes even approaches the poetic, Angel Falling Softly quickly removes itself from the paperback horror shelf. Not only is it a Mormon vampire novel, it’s a literary Mormon vampire novel. (Or, if you’re one of those people who see in the word “literary” the negative connotation of “work written by academics only intended to be read by other academics who are themselves writing work to be read by academics,” you can consider it a literary Mormon vampire novel.) It’s worth noting that although by style and diction Angel Falling Softly is as far away as you can get from Twilight, the novels have one other similarity beyond those I’ve already cited: Neither is truly a horror novel, despite the vampires. (I think Twilight decisively demonstrated to the few holdouts among the reading public that one shouldn’t assume that the presence of vampires guarantees a “horror” label.)

Given the difficulties of harmonizing Mormonism and supernatural creatures in a single story, the extra hurdle of the LDS cultural disinclination to delve in detail into the darkness could probably sink any prospects for a Mormon vampire horror novel being read, literary or not. Angel Falling Softly is rightly classified as a drama, one with a Mormon context and a fantastic premise. What keeps it from being shelved simply in that small category of “LDS speculative literature” (or that considerably larger one of “Mormon melodrama”) is the fact that the ethical questions the characters confront aren’t cleanly answered by the final chapter. The events of the story do reach a catharsis of sorts, but the conflicts raised by questions of morality and righteousness are called into a truce rather than wholly resolved. I guess if that’s good enough for the Book of Job, it’s good enough for this book.
BRAVING THE BORDERLANDS . . .

GUILT, GIRL, AND GOSPEL

by D. Jeff Burton

I N THIS COLUMN, I share the experiences of two Borderlanders and an update from Kristin (December 2007). I've edited details for brevity, clarity, and to protect identities. Our first story relates themes many Borderlanders experience: feelings of guilt and the ties that bind.

JENNY: I just recently discovered SUNSTONE and your Borderlands columns.1 I'm definitely a Borderlander and have been much of my life. I grew up in the Church near the East Coast. My parents were and still are very active. My mother has been in Relief Society presidencies my entire life, and my father has been in and out of bishoprics, stake presidencies, and other leadership callings. A fond childhood memory is going with my father and sisters to Boy Scout events.

I was married in the temple at age twenty to an amazing man. He is a true believer but has been very accepting of my Borderland status. During a storm when he was fourteen, he was hit by a falling tree branch in the ward parking lot. He believes that if he had listened to a voice of warning, he would not have been injured and would not now have a disability. It was a seminal religious experience that has affected his life ever since.

JEFF: How did the accident disable him? Does he feel like it was punishment for “not listening?” Does he feel a lot of guilt?

JENNY: The branch hit him on the head and caused a permanent neck injury which left his left arm withered and weak. I asked him if he thinks the neck injury was punishment. He said no, but when I asked him if he thinks he would still have his health if he'd listened to “the voice,” he said, “Yes, but it is what it is.” I think he sees it as a punishment but calls it something else to avoid feelings of guilt.

JEFF: How would your husband describe the voice he should have been listening to? Was it an audible message (“Don’t walk under the tree.”) which he purposely ignored, or (much more likely) was it, “I felt an apprehension at the time and didn’t recognize the message?” He might be carrying around an entirely unwarranted sense of guilt. Few of us believe God is up there devising little traps for us. And any god who would set up that kind of test and subsequent punishment for kids isn’t a god most Mormons would recognize.

JENNY: He said he remembers hearing a voice say something like, “Don’t go under that tree in this wind.” He said he doesn’t know why he did not listen to the promptings. So the, “I felt an apprehension at the time and didn’t recognize the message” category sounds most applicable to me.

JENNY (about a week later): Something new—I decided to resign from the LDS Church. I've sent my official letter to the bishop. Unfortunately he is not willing to put it right through. He wants to come and talk to me (and tell me I am going to hell, probably).

JEFF: Wow! That’s a big new development! What precipitated your decision at this time? You hadn’t mentioned that you were thinking of resigning your membership. How has your family reacted?

JENNY: What precipitated this event? I had just had enough! For a long time, I’d been thinking about resigning. The lack of a decision was making me crazy. If it really becomes an issue with my husband, then I’ll have to figure something else out; he is the most important aspect of my life. My husband is furious, but I will love him no matter what. But he’s tough; he’ll get through this. Anyway, after I die, he can marry someone else in the temple so he will get that celestial life he wants. (Ha, ha.)

Last night, I slept the best I have in years! I feel such a relief; this huge weight has been lifted from me. I feel so much happier. I haven’t told my kids yet nor my extended family. I don’t plan to tell them ‘til I see them again. I know this sounds crazy, but I feel like my life has started anew.

JEFF: Okay, but a slow and steady forward motion can help avoid the rocking-boat syndrome. Maybe before your bishop pushes this through, you should see about getting counseling with your husband and plan a future that works for both of you and your children. It’s a messy business, and you don’t want to disrupt others’ lives too much.

JENNY: Well, my happiness lasted three days. My husband became very despondent and depressed. I have never seen him this way. So I went to the bishop and got my resignation letter back. It was awkward. But, most interesting, now my husband feels guilty! He thinks he guilt-tripped me into not resigning.

JEFF: Well, what have you learned from this experience?

JENNY: Here are a few things: 1. It is okay to be yourself, but figure out what you value most; then decide how what you do will affect you and your family. When my husband became despondent and depressed, I decided right then it was not worth it to me to see him in pain. 2. Be adaptable.

D. JEFF BURTON is an author and a former member of the Sunstone Board of Directors.

DECEMBER 2009
My husband believes that if he had listened to a voice of warning, he would not have been injured and would not now have a disability.

Our next story is a common experience for young intellectual Borderlanders.

TIM: I'm a Church investigator, so I'm kind of in the Borderlands, wondering if I should join the inner circle. I never expected to be in this position, but I met and had a promising relationship with a Mormon girl. We never spoke about religious issues, and frankly I had no idea there could be any problems. People cautioned me, but I assumed it was because of aspects such as the Word of Wisdom. Many people cannot give those behaviors up, so being with a Mormon is not possible for them. But I don't drink, smoke, do drugs, or believe in sex outside of marriage, so I figured, "Big deal."

Well, as you can imagine, I soon found out the real reason her Mormonism was problematic: celestial marriage. After agonizing over our situation for a few days, she told me she had to have a temple wedding because she had felt it was right ever since she'd been a little girl. That was that. We were both respectful and didn't question or encourage the other to change our faiths. But we decided that we had to say our goodbyes last month. We might have been hasty but felt that continuing as friends would be too hard since our feelings for each other were as strong as ever despite the situation. But if I'm being totally honest with myself, I must admit that some of my efforts have been motivated by her.

JEFF: Does your motivation to study Mormonism include the possibility of getting back with your girlfriend? Or is your interest strictly for yourself? What are your motivators here?

TIM: I've asked myself this question numerous times during the past two weeks. When things originally came to a close, I hadn't considered the idea of looking into Mormonism, nor did she ever push me towards it. We haven't spoken since saying our goodbyes last month. We might have been hasty but felt that continuing as friends would be too hard since our feelings for each other were as strong as ever despite the situation. But if I'm being totally honest with myself, I must admit that some of my efforts have been motivated by her.

JEFF: Making major life decisions is complicated. It never hurts to investigate anything, and Mormonism is certainly worth looking into. You're obviously a curious and intellectual person, as well as someone tuned into the spiritual side of life. You can be reasonable and rational in this quest. If your major motivating force becomes your relationship with your ex-girlfriend, your work and study can include determining how far you can go in adjusting your thinking and behaviors to meet her needs. Most couples do this on various issues, religious being only one. We all make accommodations, but being honest with yourself and others as you make them is best.

TIM: Okay, I've done some hard, honest self-reflection. Looking deeply made me realize that the girl most likely is my primary motivation for investigating. I don't think I was necessarily being self-deceptive, because there are definitely other factors that drew me to investigate Mormonism: a community of people with similar values, an outlet for doing work for others, and just as important, an avenue to get some kind of spirituality back in my life. These are all things I didn't realize I might be missing out on before I met her, so it still could reasonably be said that I'm looking "because of" and not "for" her.

JEFF: You have two important, intertwined issues that need to be dealt with as such. And there are ways to find a middle ground with others. My uncle, a life-long, non-believer in Mormonism, went along with my aunt's need for a temple marriage, but he didn't participate much after their marriage (although he often attended church with her). Happily, their marriage went well because my aunt loved him, saw the best in him, and always defended him as a "good, honest man." They were together for almost fifty years. If your girlfriend sees you as the kind of man she admires and wants to spend the rest of her life with, regardless of your religious attachments, she will accommodate your needs and meet you half way. If she is looking only to marry a true-believer, then you have two choices: Either you will have to become a true-believer (which could happen after your investigation of Mormonism, who knows), or you will have to be dishonest and pretend you're a true believer (which has certainly happened in some cases but is not advisable). Why don't you simply express to your girlfriend what you've said to me? I don't think it would be too emotionally troubling for her. At least you'll know where she stands, what she expects, and what she thinks of you as a person.

TIM: I think you are right. If I talk to her candidly and honestly, I don't see her being upset. I guess part of me is afraid to open things up again and be disappointed. But if she needs a true-believer, that doesn't really say anything about her feelings towards my qualities or who I am as a person. I suppose I already know the answer to how she feels...
about me. The last day we spent together she kept saying she wished time could stop forever, so we could be together. She may still want a true-believer, but I guess if that is the case, then I can know that it wasn't a rejection of the core “me.” I'll let you know what happens.

TIM (several weeks later): Since my last email, I've done a lot of reading, thinking, and researching. We did, in fact, end up talking, and it was fairly interesting. We talked about what she believed, and I was pretty shocked how attached to the Mormon Church she is. It was not at all apparent when we first got together. At one point, she said that even if the Church is not true, and she could know that, she would rather not know the information. She said, “I have so much history and comfort in the Church that I would rather not know that truth.” This statement really blew me away and, honestly, did not sit well. It actually saddens me that people could be brought up and conditioned in such a way that they would dedicate their life to something regardless of whether or not it is true.

Anyway, based on how she was acting and some of the things she said explicitly, I could tell that her feelings for me were coming back. So I've decided to not contact her again even though she thinks that the door has been reopened for at least a friendship. Should she contact me, I'll do my best to be there in the way I can be, but I don't want the same situation to rear its ugly head again. I still care about her as a person and, accordingly, I'm going to do my best to make sure nobody gets hurt again.

HERE'S an update from “Kristin” whose story was related in the December 2007 column.

KRISTIN: I want to update everybody on our long journey. Last December, my husband and I decided (yet again!) that we needed to re-evaluate our situation and what we wanted for the family. Through some spiritual experiences, including a very real and felt connection with our grandparents who have passed on to the other side, my husband and I decided to give Mormonism another chance.

Here are the reasons: (1) Mormonism is my heritage, and there is power and goodness in passing on this strong heritage to my children. Plus I love the youth programs. They can't be beat, and I've looked around at other options. (2) There is good-ness here. Can I love and be loved? Serve and be served? Feel God's presence there? The answers are yes. (3) I had what I believe is a “tender mercy.” Some of the burden of caring and thinking and fretting so much about issues such as Church history and polygamy was lifted. Not that I have rock-solid answers, but I realized that these issues really do not affect my everyday walk and way of life, so why let them take up so much space in my head? Much better to enjoy each day, be present for my children, love my husband and enjoy the now of my life, which includes my ward community and very LDS family.

I was able to attend my brother's temple wedding in June. I'm so glad I was there and felt worthy and happy to be there. I am not attending the temple much, but I don't feel the need to push myself in that area. This past August, my husband baptized both of our boys—the ten-year-old who had never been baptized and our eight-year-old. (I'm attaching a couple of pictures from that day; I thought you'd enjoy seeing them.) We got special permission to hold the baptism outdoors at our family cabin. It was one of the most precious memories of my life, and I'm sure it will be a tender memory for my sweet boys.

Now, I don't mean to make it sound “happily ever after” because I'm sure there will be future bumps in the road. But I feel quite strongly that I have chosen Mormonism for better or worse. It's who I am, and I feel liberated by letting a lot of it just wash over me instead of bother me. My bishop called me to be Primary pianist (a calling I'd hoped and prayed for!), and they are leaving my husband alone for now.

Life is good, Jeff. I am happy to say that I feel as if I've reached a different place with my spiritual journey. To be honest, it's because I am not taking it all too seriously, but embracing and honoring the parts of Mormonism that I love and hold dear.

NOTE

1. Copies of all previous Borderlands columns are available for free download at my website: www.forthosewhowonder.com.
GAY COUPLE ARRESTED FOR KISSING ON LDS PLAZA

LDS SECURITY PERSONNEL ALLEGEDLY DETAINED and handcuffed a gay couple for kissing in Salt Lake City’s Main Street Plaza last July.

Matt Aune, 28, and Derek Jones, 25, believe they were targeted because they are gay. Said Aune: “We weren’t doing anything inappropriate or illegal, or anything most people would consider inappropriate for any other couple.”

Church spokesperson Kim Farah denied that the couple was singled out because they are gay. “The individuals came on Church property and were politely asked to stop engaging in inappropriate behavior—just like any other couple would have been.”

The arrest generated a wave of protests. Organized mostly via social networks, hundreds of demonstrators, both gay and straight, held two peaceful “kiss-ins” at Temple Square. A third “kiss-in” took place at the San Diego Temple.

One of the “kiss-in” organizers was Deeda Seed, a former Salt Lake City councilwoman who ten years ago opposed the sale of Main Street to the LDS Church. “We’re giving a visual demonstration of the power of love,” Seed said during one of the protests, “and saying that it should be OK for people to show affection regardless of their sexual orientation or age.”

BYU graduate Kate Savage attended the “kiss-in” with her boyfriend, Tristan Call. “It’s as if the doctrine of the importance of families we’re taught is used to destroy other people’s families, and we don’t understand that,” Savage said.

Aune and Jones later appeared on Comedy Central’s The Colbert Report to talk about the incident. One of the segments shows two men passionately kissing in front of the Salt Lake Temple. In another segment, two actors dressed up as Mormon missionaries kiss on a couch.

City prosecutor Sim Gill declined to press charges against Aune and Jones, saying that the entrance to the plaza appears too much like a public passageway. “The two individuals believed—albeit mistakenly—that they had the right to be there,” Gill said. “Fairness requires that either that property be not open to the public or you condition that [openness] in a way that the person who comes on understands that it is private property.”

In late September, LDS officials quietly changed the signs on the plaza, which now read, “The [LDS Church] reserves the right to refuse access to any person for any reason.” “Private Property” signs have also been added to the area.

The incident reopened wounds that date back almost ten years, when the LDS Church was embroiled in a legal case over the right to control behavior and speech on the Temple Square section of Main Street, which the Church had purchased from the city for $8.1 million.

“What we’re seeing now is the manifestation of what should have been obvious from the beginning,” reflects former Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson. “The block of Main Street never should have been conveyed to the LDS Church. It was a recipe for ongoing resentments between the LDS Church and those who are not members.”

LDS CHURCH BACKS LAW AGAINST LGBT DISCRIMINATION

ON 9 NOVEMBER, THE LDS CHURCH ANNOUNCED its support for two Salt Lake City ordinances which would protect gay and transgender people from housing and employment discrimination.

“The Church supports this ordinance because it is fair and reasonable and does not do violence to the institution of marriage,” said LDS spokesperson Michael Otterson during a hearing before the Salt Lake City Council. “It is also entirely consistent with the Church’s prior position on these matters. The Church remains unequivocally committed to defending the bedrock founda-

Hey! No PDA on the Plaza!
MORMONISM AND THE
“GLENN BECK PHENOMENON”

SUDDENLY GLENN BECK, RIGHT-WING POPULIST and libertarian, seems to be everywhere, from his radio show, with its 9 million listeners weekly, to his TV show, with its daily 2.5 million viewers, to Time magazine, which granted him the 17 September cover. His books sell like hotcakes, spending weeks on the New York Times bestseller list.

By design, Beck’s out-of-control persona and poisonous tongue attract controversy. But recently, critics and commentators have paid more attention to the fact that Beck is a Mormon. Not Mormon royalty like Mitt Romney, but Mormon nonetheless, having converted ten years ago, along with his wife, when the couple lived in Washington state.

The media zoomed in on Beck’s religion after he began heavily promoting The 5,000 Year Leap—a book by the great patriarch of Mormon ultra-conservatism, Cleon Skousen. The book explains how the U.S. Constitution and Judeo-Christian values have combined to make the United States the greatest nation on earth. In a recent Salon.com piece exploring the Beck–Skousen connection, Alexander Zaitchik tracks Skousen’s transformation from a garden-variety anti-Communist to a New Word Order conspiracy theorist. Although left unsaid, the implication of Zaitchik’s narrative seems clear: Glenn Beck is as paranoid as Skousen.

In a piece for The Boston Phoenix, Adam Reilly identifies Ezra Taft Benson, the “White Horse Prophecy,” and Section 101 of Doctrine and Covenants as additional ingredients in Glenn Beck’s Mormon ultraconservatism. “Thanks to Beck’s chosen LDS influences,” Reilly concludes, “he’s currently interpreting the first years of the 21st century via a melodramatic, anxiety-soaked worldview” whose origins date back to the anti-Mormon persecution and Mormon apocalypticism of the 19th century.

Author Joanna Brooks agrees, noting Beck’s use of themes, language, and even emotional displays which either derive from or at least resonate with Mormonism. “How much traction Glenn Beck can muster remains to be seen,” Brooks concludes in a piece posted in Religion Dispatches. “But if the American religious right has sometimes been imagined as a monolithic product of the evangelical Deep South and Bible Belt, the rise of Glenn Beck suggests that those who would understand American conservatism might also look West, toward Salt Lake City.”

In light of the emphasis these commentators place on Beck’s Mormonism as the source of his politics, it is surprising how few clear endorsements Beck has received from other Mormons. Granted, Beck was asked to host Provo’s Stadium of Fire three years in a row—one year short of the all-time record held by the Osmonds—and the conservative Meridian Magazine speaks of him in mildly favorable terms. But unlike in 2008, when many proudly pasted “Mormons for Romney” across their bumpers, Mormons for Beck seem, like FARMS’s Lamanites, to be a rather small tribe. Google, at least, is hard-pressed to locate them. Are LDS Beck enthusiasts too old to blog? Too libertarian to get nationally organized? Or are they waiting for Beck to announce his presidential ambitions before they come out?

Beck’s popularity among the LDS is now further threatened by progressive Mormons who regard him as a disgrace, and who have been especially vocal since Beck infamously opined that President Obama has a “deep-seated hate for white people.” “My instinct is to write this guy off and accord him all the hate in my heart,” Reese Dixon wrote on the blog Feminist Mormon Housewives in response to Beck’s comment. “To apologize to anyone I see and make sure they understand that he is not a representative of the [Mormon] faith.”

“Jacob S.” echoed a similar sentiment on the blog The Mormon Left: “Do you suppose that Beck could go from his radio show where he calls Hillary Clinton a stereotypical bitch, or a grieving mother/anti-war activist a big prostitute, directly to the temple and feel good about that? Do you suppose he could be in the foyer after sacrament meeting and call the nations directly to the south of America, where the Church is growing exponentially, dirt-bags as a Honduran walks by, and feel good about that?”

It remains to be seen where Beck’s passionate rhetoric will take him—and how many Mormons will follow him. At a time when the LDS Church has been trying to show that Mormons are patriotic, moderate, and mainstream, Beck’s antics put a face on Mormonism that LDS leaders may not appreciate. With his anti-government populism, and penchant for conspiracy theories, Beck invokes a much older Mormon style—one that flourished in the 19th century, slowly declined in the twentieth, and seemed finally to have passed away with Ezra Taft Benson and Cleon Skousen. The “Glenn Beck phenomenon” suggests that this strand of Mormonism may not be dead after all—just patiently waiting for the right leader to come along.
tion of marriage between a man and a woman."

The ordinances, which make it illegal to fire or evict people based on gender identity or sexual orientation, exempts religious organizations, businesses with fewer than fifteen employees, and some small landlords.

"I represent a Church that believes in human dignity, in treating others with respect even when we disagree—in fact especially when we disagree," Otterson added. "The Church's past statements are on the public record for all to see. In these comments and in our actions, we try to follow what Jesus Christ taught. Our language will always be respectful and acknowledge those who differ, but will also be clear on matters that we feel are of great consequence to our society."

According to the Salt Lake Tribune, the announcement follows more than two months of secret meetings between LDS officials and some of Utah's most prominent gay leaders.

David Melson, executive director of Affirmation: Gay and Lesbian Mormons, issued a statement applauding the LDS Church. "This is an opportunity for the Church to take a position of leadership to declare an end to the hostilities that have divided our country and our families, to welcome all of God's children into the Church of Jesus Christ," said Melson. "We are grateful for this first step; we await the second."

Gene Robinson, a gay Episcopal bishop, also commended the Church. "I am so encouraged by what just happened in Salt Lake City," Robinson said on NPR. "[LDS leaders] realized that with their input into the Prop 8 fight in California, their standing as a national denomination really had suffered from that, and I think this might be the first gentle melting of what has been a solid opposition on their part, and I really congratulate them for that."

Appearing on CNN's The Joy Behar Show, Academy Award-winning director Dustin Lance Black, who is gay and grew up in a Mormon household, said he was "thrilled" by the news. "To a lot of people, it seems like a small step towards tolerance—it's just about non-discrimination. But if you know that church, you can see that it's a signal to the entire population, saying, 'it's not OK to discriminate anymore,' which is such a huge change from when I was in the Church."

One year ago, LDS temples across the country were the target of massive protests by people unhappy with the prominent role the LDS Church had played in helping pass Proposition 8 in California. Two days after Prop 8 was passed, L. Whitney Clayton of the Presidency of the Seventy held a press conference stating that the Church's opposition to same-sex marriage doesn't equate with hostility toward gays and lesbians.

Said Clayton: "The Church does not object to rights for same-sex couples regarding hospitalization and medical care, fair housing and employment rights, or probate rights, so long as these do not infringe on the integrity of the traditional family or of the constitutional rights of churches" (SUNSTONE, December 2008: 77).

Since then, Equality Utah, a gay rights group, has been encouraging the LDS Church to support a number of gay-friendly bills, including a statewide domestic partnership bill echoing the language Elder Clayton used last year.

Although the anti-bias ordinance applies only to Salt Lake City, some believe it will model LDS positions on a larger scale. "Anything good is shareable," Apostle Jeffrey R. Holland told the Salt Lake Tribune the day after the statement was announced. "Everybody ought to have the freedom to frame the statutes the way they want. But at least the process and the good will and working at it, certainly that could be modeled anywhere and even elements of the statute."

CHURCH LAUNCHES OWN EDITION OF LA SANTA BIBLIA

THIRTY YEARS AFTER PRODUCING AN ENGLISH edition of the Bible, the LDS Church has just unveiled a Spanish equivalent: "Santa Biblia: Reina–Valera 2009." The name refers to Casiodoro de Reina and Cipriano de Valera who in the 16th Century produced a translation which became the basis for most Protestant editions of the Spanish Bible.

With minor updates to the grammar and vocabulary, the LDS text is based on the 1909 edition of the Reina-Valera text, which is now in the public domain. The LDS edition includes new chapter headings, footnotes, cross-references, and other aids especially designed for LDS readers, including excerpts from the Joseph Smith Translation.

President Thomas S. Monson called the new edition "the finest Spanish Bible in all the world."

With some four million Mormons scattered across Latin America and Spain, Spanish is, after English, the most spoken language in the Church.

A detailed explanation of the new edition is available in Spanish at santabiblia.lds.org. The full text is available online at escrituras.lds.org.

PROP 8 BACKLASH, CIVIL RIGHTS STRUGGLE COMPARED

ELDER DALLIN OAKS OF THE QUORUM OF THE Twelve became the target of criticism after he compared the anti-Mormon backlash that followed the passing of Proposition 8 to the discrimination and violence African-Americans experienced in the 1950s and 1960s.

"We have endured a wave of media-reported charges that the Mormons are trying to 'deny' people or 'strip' people of their 'rights,'" Elder Oaks told BYU–Idaho students on 13 October. "We must not be deterred or coerced into silence by the kinds of intimidation I have de-
picketing church sites, and boycotting businesses are not so much anti-religious as anti-democratic,” Oaks added. “In their effect they are like the well-known and widely condemned voter-intimidation of blacks in the South that produced corrective federal civil-rights legislation.”

University of Utah historian Colleen McDannell is among those who took issue with Oaks’s statement. “Were four little Mormon girls blown up in the church at Sunday school? Were there burning crosses planted on local bishops’ lawns? Were people lynched and their genitals stuffed in their mouths?” she asked. “By comparing these two things, it diminishes the real violence that African-Americans experienced in the ‘60s, when they were struggling for equal rights. There is no equivalence between the two.”

Bill Russell, J.D., retired professor of American history and government at Graceland University, agrees that the comparison doesn’t hold. “It is quite a stretch to compare any recent suffering experienced by the LDS Church or its members to that of blacks who met resistance trying to register to vote or seeking other rights that were denied them,” Russell wrote. “If you go into the public arena, as the church did, you should expect the other side will fight back. Articles and letters in publications, picketing church sites, and boycotting businesses are normal political responses.”

In an interview with Church Public Affairs a few days after the BYU–Idaho speech, Oaks clarified, “I would say that the intimidation I refer to in connection to Proposition 8 was not as serious as what happened in the South, but I think the analogy is a good one.”

On 14 October, MSNBC’s commentator Keith Olbermann spotlighted Oaks in his “Worst Person in the World” segment. Said Olbermann: “One would think that with the Mormons’ history of having previously been on the wrong side of integration and the wrong side of that pesky ‘ancient order’ of one woman per marriage, that these are subjects about which Elder Oaks would want to shut the hell up.”

When Proposition 8 was passed last year, protestors demonstrated in front of several LDS temples (SUNSTONE, December 2008: 76–79), boycotted some businesses owned by Church members, and vandalized some LDS meetinghouses. Mormons contributed an estimated $15 million to California’s Yes on 8 campaign—nearly half the campaign’s funds in a state where Mormons make up 2 percent of the population.

Last April President Thomas S. Monson made an oblique reference to the backlash that followed Prop 8 when he stated during general conference that “the moral footings of society continue to slip, while those who attempt to safeguard those footings are often ridiculed and, at times, picketed and persecuted” (Ensign, May 2009: 89).

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**People**

**Deceased.** ROBERT J. MATTHEWS, 82, BYU professor of ancient scripture who pioneered research on the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. In the 1940s, Matthews began to build friendships with officials of the RLDS Church (now the Community of Christ), who allowed him to inspect the original JST documents. Sometimes called the Inspired Version, excerpts from the translation were included in the 1979 LDS edition of the English Bible.

**Turned 82.** LDS President THOMAS S. MONSON, on the day he presided over the dedication of the Oquirrh Mountain Temple. The online magazine Slate recently ranked President Monson first place on its roster of most powerful octogenarians.

**Deceased.** Long-time Sunstone community member C. JESS GROESBECK, 26 October 2009. He was 75. Psychiatrist and Jungian psychoanalyst, as well as associate professor of psychiatry at the University of California, Davis, he was a prodigious producer of articles and symposium presentations on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon.

**Sentenced.** FLDS member RAYMOND MERRIL JESSOP, 38, to 10 years in prison, for sexually assaulting a 16-year-old girl. Eleven more members of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are expected to be tried during 2010 on similar charges. Jessop’s trial was based on evidence obtained during the April 2008 raid of the Yearning For Zion Ranch near Eldorado, Texas.

**Repentant.** LDS filmmaker KIETH MERILL, 69, for having set his faith-promoting film The Testaments in Mesoamerica. “I’m the guy who made the biggest, most expensive film [the LDS Church] has ever made, and I put it in the wrong place,” Merrill recently said at a Book of Mormon Prophecies conference. Merrill explained that recent research by ROD MELDRUM has led him to believe that the events described in the Book of Mormon occurred in North America. The Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR) recently issued a statement criticizing Meldrum for producing a DVD that “plants erroneous information, concepts, and expectations in the minds of viewers.”
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