

More than a “Subspecies of American Literature”: Obstacles toward a Transnational Mormon Novel

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Introduction

Literary critics have been largely indifferent toward the future of Mormon literature. In *The American Religion* (1992), however, Harold Bloom begins his analysis of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints¹ with what seems to be at once a magnanimous compliment to the Mormon people and a prophecy about the future of their literature: “A major American poet, perhaps one called a Gentile by the Latter-day Saints, some time in the future will write their early story as the epic it was. Nothing else in all of American history strikes me as *materia poetica* equal to the early Mormons, to Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Parley and Orson Pratt, and the men and women who were their followers and friends.”² Setting aside the fact that the “early story” of the Mormons had already been written “as the epic it was” by two moderately successful American poets—Vardis Fisher (*Children of God*, 1939) and Orson Scott Card (*Saints*, 1983)—this “prophecy” is interesting not so much for its (perhaps glib) attention to Mormon literature or the apparent intrinsic poetry of the Mormon past, but rather in the way it assumes that the future author of the early Mormon story will be an American telling an American story. Did Bloom not consider that the early Mormon story—assuming there was *only one*—perhaps had a more global setting than the stock images of Mormon pioneers in ox-drawn wagons and rickety handcarts usually suggest? Did he not realize that that story—or a much broader one—could be told just as well by a “major poet” whose ties to the United States are minimal at best?

Probably not—and understandably so. As a movement that emerged in upstate New York during the Second Great Awakening, Mormonism seems almost indivisible from its American beginnings and strong doctrinal and folkloric traditions about the

role of the United States in God's eternal plan. Even so, Mormons have always been global players—so much so that, while they migrated westward across the nineteenth-century United States, their missionaries ventured beyond American borders to carry out the “titanic design . . . to convert the nation and the world” (94). And while Mormon policy was initially to encourage these converts to immigrate to the American “Zion,” such action was not always practical, and policies about gathering converts to the United States changed gradually around the turn of the twentieth century. As early as 1890, for example, Mormon officials were instructing missionaries to discourage immigration in order to strengthen Mormon communities in other parts of the United States and the world.³ Since then, Mormonism's international presence has grown significantly. In 1950, for example, the Mormon Church had a mere 7.7 percent of its 1.1 million church members living beyond American borders. By 2008, that number had jumped to nearly 50 percent of 13.5 million church members, with Mormons living in some 170 countries or territories around the world.⁴

But even with this impressive international growth, the perception remains—both in and outside of the community—that Mormonism is a system deeply intertwined with the United States. According to one story, much-circulated in Mormon circles, the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy once allegedly proclaimed Mormonism to be “the *American* religion” because of the democratic way its “principles teach the people not only of Heaven and its attendant glories, but how to live so that their social and economic relations with each other are placed on a sound basis.”⁵ While it is unlikely that Tolstoy actually described Mormonism in precisely those terms, if at all, the assumption that Mormonism is “quintessentially” American has been common among outside observers, including Harold Bloom.⁶ As historian Ethan Yorgason notes, such a characterization is based on claims about Mormonism's numerical presence in America, American origins, apparent distinctiveness from imported Protestant traditions, and apparent embrace of “basic American values, ideologies, and practices.”⁷ The relative paucity of studies about Mormonism's international presence and history no doubt contributes to this notion as well.⁸

This has certainly been the case in Mormon literary studies. Anthologies of Mormon literature since the 1970s have largely privileged stories by and about American Mormons—particularly American Mormons in Utah—a tendency that has bothered some critics. In 1974, for example, critic Bruce W. Jorgensen took issue with the editors of *A Believing People*, the first modern Mormon literary anthology, for “implicitly [defining] Mormon literature as a subspecies of American literature.”⁹ Citing Mormonism's increasingly international presence, he reasoned that while “most Mormon literature still [was] American in some sense . . . it would profit us to have an anthology that reflected” the voices of a world church.¹⁰ Since then there has been no shortage of follow-ups to *A Believing People*, yet they remain dominated by works of North American writers whose interests and concerns often play out against a canvas of irrigation imagery, red rock, ranching, and other aspects of rural and contemporary

Utah Mormon life. If transnational Mormon experiences occur at all in these anthologies, they generally occur within the framework of missionary labor.¹¹

Mormon novels, to be sure, have generally addressed transnational themes and international situations better than the shorter works that have appeared in anthologies. In the novels of Nephi Anderson, one of the earliest Mormon novelists, Mormon characters from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean served as models for proper Mormon behavior and attitudes following the Church's retreat from utopian experiments in polygamy and cooperative economics at the end of the nineteenth century. In these novels, Anderson sought to reconcile disparate, post-utopian feelings of national belonging and alienation by portraying Mormonism as unique enough to be universally appealing and applicable but also fundamentally American.¹² This study examines how a selection of more recent Mormon novels have continued and modified this approach in their depiction of transnational Mormon experiences. Specifically, it addresses how the Mormon novel can function as a transnational expression of Mormonism's post-utopian desire to define itself as part of and separate from mainstream cultural trends, portraying the Mormon people as a *transnational* community engaged in projects of conditioning an American church to non-US societies, cultures, and nations where the need to identify against and acclimate to dominant cultures and powers likewise exists.¹³ In doing so, it foregrounds the challenges of Mormon globalization, drawing attention to obstacles within Mormonism that prevent the Mormon novel from taking greater transnational leaps in its portrayal of Mormon experiences. Moreover, it explores how certain novels employ transnational utopian spaces that address questions of colonialism and global community; religious orthodoxy, heterodoxy, and heresy; and intercultural exchanges (via the Mormon missionary program and other sites of exchange) to negotiate these obstacles. Accordingly, in paying special attention to ways texts function as imaginative sites where dilemmas about globalization can be worked out toward ethical, utopian ends, this study reveals that Mormon novels have sometimes embraced and sometimes resisted the hegemonic narrative(s) of American Mormonism in order to reaffirm, reconsider, and even revise long-standing assumptions about the value of boundaries and central gathering places that have traditionally defined Mormonism's physical, cultural, and ideological landscapes.

Obstacles

Mormon writers, to be sure, are not the only group that sees the novel as a way to come to terms with its community's globalization. Critic Rachel Adams, for example, suggests that "a constellation" of American novelists have recently been moving in transnational directions by resisting the "stylistic and conceptual premises of high postmodernism" and focusing instead on "the intensification of global processes" that have developed over the last half-century, particularly since the dissolution of the Cold War.¹⁴ Using Karen Tei Yamashita's novel *Tropic of Orange* (1997) as a model,

Adams argues that contemporary American fiction is in the process of moving beyond an aesthetic derived from Cold War politics and paranoia—typical of the works of Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo—toward a trend that Adams calls “American literary globalism.” According to Adams, this American literary globalism builds on certain conventions of postmodernism yet has an entirely “new set of genealogical, geographic, and temporal referents,” including an interest in global politics, multiethnic perspectives, geopolitical cleavages and tensions, border crossings, national and transnational relations, economic flows, and polyvocality (see 261–65). For Adams, this literary globalism opens up a “shared perception of community whereby, for better or worse, populations in one part of the world are inevitably affected by events in another” (268).

It would be inaccurate to suggest, of course, that Mormon novelists have embraced “American literary globalism” as Adams defines it, or even a kind of “Mormon literary globalism” subspecies. As noted earlier, transnational concerns have always had a place in Mormon novels since the genre’s beginnings in the late nineteenth century, yet these works hardly constitute a majority within the still-developing genre.¹⁵ Furthermore, additional obstacles exist that fail to incentivize Mormon novels to truly explore the transnational. For instance, unique Mormon scripture establishes America as the future home of the New Jerusalem,¹⁶ and Mormon leaders throughout the twentieth century employed these teachings toward more nationalistic ends, often as catalysts for greater assimilation into mainstream America. Over time, Mormons even acquired a reputation for being “models of patriotic, law-abiding citizenship, sometimes seeming to ‘out-American’ all other Americans.”¹⁷ By privileging the United States as a “Promised Land” in this way, American Mormons have therefore tended to reify national borders and create a sense that the United States is the standard to which all other nations should aspire, generating the notion that the United States is perhaps of more interest to Mormons—and Mormon readers—than other lands. For those wishing to write about Mormonism as a global phenomenon rather than an American church, this could pose a problem.

Perhaps one of the greatest obstacles facing the development of a more transnational Mormon fiction, however, is the question of representing the global Mormon experience itself, particularly when those likely doing the representing are white Mormon Americans whose experience with the broader world may be limited to two years’ worth of missionary service in a relatively confined and localized area in the world. Indeed postcolonial theorists have long resisted Western efforts to depict non-Western lives and cultures because of the way these efforts often appropriate and exoticize these lives and cultures to participate in a kind of Western fantasy. In his classic essay of postcolonial theory, “An Image of Africa” (1975), for example, Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe famously identifies a “desire” or “need” in the West “to set Africa up as a foil in Europe, a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar in comparison with which Europe’s own state of spiritual grace will be manifest.”¹⁸ Edward Said, in his foundational book *Orientalism* (1979), proposes something similar

when he suggests that Western representations of the Middle East tend to construct an “Orient” that “help[s] to define Europe (or the West)” as something apart from and superior to non-Western cultures and peoples.¹⁹ In both instances, representation is a device through which the representer can claim control and superiority over the represented, and thus define its “Self” against an “Other.” For Achebe, particularly, this tendency betrays the West’s “deep anxieties about the precariousness of its civilization” and its fear about its “physical and moral deformities” peeking through its “erect and immaculate” mien.²⁰

To a certain extent, this happens in transnational Mormon fiction, particularly in texts with strong nationalistic layers that privilege the history and experience of white American Mormons over everyone else. Missionary fiction, particularly, shows evidence of this tendency in the way it typically explores the tensions arising from American Mormons’ interactions with non-American, non-Mormon peoples and cultures. A look at recent examples of the subgenre—Coke Newell’s *On the Road to Heaven* (2007), Douglas Thayer’s *The Tree House* (2008), S. P. Bailey’s *Millstone City* (2012), and Ryan McIlvain’s *Elders* (2013)—shows that these novels largely explore transnational tensions and interactions through a decidedly American lens, often viewing anything non-American as either convert material or alienating and potentially hostile. (This view, in turn, is parodied in Trey Parker, Matt Stone, and Robert Lopez’s 2011 award-winning Broadway musical, *The Book of Mormon*.) For instance, in *On the Road to Heaven*, a kind of Mormon homage to the works of Jack Kerouac, Newell emphasizes the threatening nature of foreign lands and peoples when his protagonist, Elder Kit West, steps off the airplane in Colombia and is met by a line of men who spit on his shoes and shout, “Go home, *gringos*,” as he and his fellow American missionaries pass them.²¹ This image of the gauntlet-like “Colombian greeting line” foreshadows one of the novel’s major transnational tensions, Kit’s experience with anti-Americanism, which mystifies him and awakens in him a dormant nationalistic fervor. Uncomfortable as the Other, he comes to picture himself at the mercy of hostile terrain: “a lonely American kid a long way from mom, home, and apple pie” (242–43).

Kit’s reaction to Colombia is but an extreme example of Mormon fiction’s tendency to portray non-American lands and their inhabitants as hostile and dangerous, the antithesis of America and the safety it proffers; the novel’s treatment of the issue, nevertheless, is indicative of the problems that go with presenting the non-American, often nonwhite Others or Other-lands from the perspective of a visitor, a transplant who may speak the language but does not understand the culture. What readers get in novels like *On the Road to Heaven* is a representation of a foreign land that is heavily mediated through the naïve eyes of young white (often male) American Mormons. Rarely do readers of Mormon fiction get the counterpoint: transnational stories that ask them to tread a foreign landscape that is as commonplace to its characters as Utah is to the characters in a Douglas Thayer or Levi Peterson novel. To borrow from Achebe, this Americentric tendency in Mormon missionary novels suggests, perhaps, not only a “deep anxiety about the precariousness” of the

American Mormon's place in the global church, but also an effort to use the genre to assert the American Mormon's role as a cultural mediator, a privileged voice whose American accent signals something transcendent and universal.²²

In theory, of course, the transnational Mormon novel, along with its missionary subgenre, can function as something other than the expression of American Mormon anxiety about the diminishing hegemonic grip of the American over the global church. Indeed, if the Mormon novel is, as this study suggests, a cultural product through which Mormons are able to work out their ambivalence to mainstream society, then attempts to question Mormon Americentrism or imagine the church as a less centralized (or even decentralized) transnational system through the novel would not only participate in Mormonism's ongoing post-utopian project of greater mainstream assimilation but also work to liberate that project from its traditional American context. Unfortunately, as works like *On the Road to Heaven* and others indicate, the Mormon novel struggles to imagine Mormonism as a community without borders, suggesting, perhaps, that it currently occupies an anxious, reactionary stance to—if not, in some cases, a denial of—the globalization of the church and its increasingly non-American majority. At the same time, however, the Mormon novel is not without a number of contemporary works that incorporate or propose transnational utopian spaces that seek to imagine a future where Mormonism is less tied to bordered concepts like *nation*, *state*, and *America*, and more open to border crossings. While these utopian spaces are not altogether unproblematic or free of Americentric assumptions, a look at how three Mormon novels use them as a way to imagine possible paths for transnational Mormonism reveals much about the potential of the genre itself for extending its post-utopian concerns to transnational Mormon assimilation efforts.

Transnational Mormon Utopian Spaces

Arguably, all transnational Mormon novels contain utopian spaces of one kind or another, although, as always, the “utopian” quality of the space is relative and may seem altogether dystopic. In Margaret Blair Young's *Salvador* (1993), for example, the use of transnational utopian spaces to imagine Mormonism as a global phenomenon defined by a distinctive identity rather than national affiliation or political boundaries is evident. Set near the end of the Salvadoran Civil War (1980–1992), the novel follows Julie, a recently divorced Mormon from Utah, as she and her parents travel to El Salvador to visit “Zarahemla,” the homestead of her Uncle Johnny and Aunt Louisa. Johnny, a seemingly visionary and idealistic man, runs Zarahemla as a kind of Mormon utopian community, offering “the kind of charity Wall Street doesn't understand” by providing poor Salvadorans with food, educational opportunities, and “untaxed land” to live on.²³ Additionally, he carries out “salvation projects” in nearby towns and villages, including one in an indigenous village called Izalco (22). In contrast to these efforts are those of George Piggott, the local leader of Mormons in Johnny's area and

a former missionary companion to Johnny and Julie's father. A successful American businessman, Piggott lives in an opulent mansion in San Salvador and embodies the hegemonic presence of the American church as well as the excesses of American capitalism and neocolonialism. For instance, he employs "Indian maids from Izalco," whom he requires to wear matching blue dresses, a requirement Johnny believes to be a gross colonial imposition akin to "butchering Indians." As Johnny explains to Julie, "the Indian's costume is her culture. Once a woman wears a dress, she can't return to her *huipil* [traditional clothing]. She loses her way back forever." By removing the maids from their *huipil*, Johnny reasons, Piggott is essentially "slaughtering them right and left. In his own front room" (7). Piggott, however, sees himself in a more philanthropic light. Like Johnny, he also operates a planned Mormon community, an urban housing project named "Bountiful," which Julia describes as "a little America" that "look[s] like somebody had misplaced a subdivision of L.A." There, Mormon and non-Mormon Salvadorans live in "pre-fab houses with clover lawns and Volkswagens" and enjoy the luxuries of "disposals and septic tanks." It is the "one thing" in Piggott's life that he "wouldn't change" (108).

Critic Robert Bird rightly suggests that *Salvador* is about a "clash of interpretations and of realities."²⁴ Both Johnny's community and Piggott's are named after important cities in the Book of Mormon, yet each represents an interpretive byproduct of a dream the men once fostered as young missionaries "to find . . . some good women and come back here to El Salvador and build Zion."²⁵ Indeed, at first glance, Johnny's utopia, with its humble surroundings and show of egalitarianism, seems to be a site of positive transnational exchange that is more in line with the utopian principles of the Book of Mormon and early Mormonism than Piggott's "pre-fab" homage to suburban America and capitalism. As the novel progresses, however, Zarahemla's hybrid culture of Mormonism infused with indigenous practices surfaces as an illusion. For Johnny, El Salvador is "tattooed with grace," the sacred land that Jesus walked on and sanctified when he visited the Americas in Book of Mormon times.²⁶ Furthermore, he is convinced that his Zarahemla is built on the original site of the Zarahemla in the Book of Mormon, although the scripture itself gives no indication that such is the case. Rather it is Johnny's fanciful and unorthodox interpretation of the Book of Mormon mythos that causes him to see, for example, proof of this claim in a cluster of overgrown Mayan ruins on his property, which he imagines Book of Mormon prophets "traipsing over the grounds, praying around, dedicating the place and just waiting for us to figure things out and pay them a visit."²⁷ On these ruins, he has constructed a reality based not on unambiguous scriptural claims, archaeological evidence, or actual cultural nexuses between Mormonism and indigenous cultures, but rather on a colonialist fantasy that romanticizes the land and its people to underwrite an ultimately self-serving utopian project. Like Piggott's blue dresses, Johnny's attempts to literalize the Book of Mormon enact a kind of colonial violence on the Salvadorans, their history, and their culture.²⁸

Ultimately, Julie's familiarity with Mayan history allows her to see through and dismantle Johnny's neocolonial project, which secretly includes polygamy, blood rituals, and a kind of racial eugenics program designed to turn indigenous Salvadorans into "a white and delightful people" (189). She and her parents ultimately flee Zarahemla, returning to a "normal Gringo life" in Utah and Mormon orthodoxy, but not before Piggott's place as the ecclesiastical authority in the region is affirmed and sustained against the heresies of Johnny's (dys)topian challenge to it (244). *Salvador*, therefore, performs deeply ambiguous cultural work in its depiction of transnational Mormonism. Neither Johnny nor Piggott presents an unproblematic paradigm for global Mormonism since both seem paternalistically indifferent to the ways their positions of ecclesiastical authority, Western mores and institutions, and romantic idealism create a hegemonic imbalance that harms those they claim to love and serve. To be sure, Piggott's efforts in El Salvador, particularly Bountiful, are cast in a better light than those of Johnny, perhaps because Piggott's generosity and Mormon orthodoxy seem to do less harm to the Salvadoran people than Johnny's alternatives. Yet *Salvador's* treatment of both Johnny and Piggott suggest that the white rule paradigm is ultimately antithetical to the development of a transnational Mormonism based on cultural respect, compassion, and exchange. Such is suggested at least in the novel's final chapter, when Julie and her parents visit Izalco before they return to Utah (235–44). Here Izalco becomes a true transnational utopian space where Mormons from Utah and Mormons from El Salvador exchange gifts, participate in Mormon and indigenous prayers and rituals, and communicate brokenly but effectively in shards of three different languages. It sets a foundation for future transnational exchanges and gestures toward a polydox Mormonism without borders and without center.

A more problematic transnational utopian space can be found in Toni Sorenson Brown's *Redemption Road* (2006). Like *Salvador*, it is a first-person narrative about a Mormon woman's transnational search for meaning in the aftermath of a traumatic divorce. Lana, the Utah-born narrator, is lapsed in her faith and works in public relations for a popular hotel in Nairobi, Kenya, a job that involves the boundary-crossing task of "creat[ing] a thriving relationship between the hotel and the community" by offering humanitarian service to a school in the city's slums.²⁹ The school, run by a devout Protestant named Mama Grace, is "a pile of rubble on a scrap of bald land" along a street called Redemption Road (8), a name, like Mama Grace's, that underscores the novel's themes of atonement, forgiveness, and spiritual reawakening. At the school, Lana becomes attached to Jomo, a seven-year-old orphan from the slums, who goes missing after she buys him a new set of clothes. Much of the novel involves Lana's search for the lost boy, which introduces her to a world of AIDS, poverty, homelessness, and human trafficking, but also places her in contact with a congregation of Kenyan Mormons who help with her search and bring her back into the fold. With their help, Jomo is eventually found, albeit dead, in Mombassa, the victim of human trafficking. The discovery is hard for Lana but eased by her

reawakened faith and the support of a transnational, trans-faith community, which compels her to “want to give back, to share that love with others” (238).

On the surface, *Redemption Road* is packaged as an inspirational novel with an activist subtext. In the forms of Mama Grace’s school, the Mormon congregation in Nairobi, and Lana’s community of friends, the novel offers several transnational utopian spaces that are either overtly Mormon or potentially Mormon. (Mama Grace’s school, for example, is not overtly Mormon, but the presence of a bookshelf lined with copies of the Book of Mormon suggests that it soon will be.) These spaces, however, are either overshadowed or compromised by the novel’s problematic, Western-centric stance toward Africa and its African characters. Following the trope Achebe identifies in “An Image of Africa,” for example, *Redemption Road*’s stereotyped depiction of Africa as “a continent stalked by diseases and plagues” presents it as the foil to Lana’s Utah homeland (9). Lana, to be sure, is ambivalent toward Utah, even characterizing it negatively as “a White state” (51), yet she casts her twin sister’s Provo home as idyllic in comparison to the poor—even “savage”—living conditions in Nairobi (see 61). Complementing this view are further stereotypes that exoticize Africa and play to Western images of Africa as a primitive site of war, barbarism, and suffering. When Lana first meets Jomo, he “whoops and breaks into a furious little warrior dance, turning circles and drumming on his black balloon of a belly” (12). The gang of teenagers who menace Lana throughout the novel are similarly characterized not only by their “hungry and savage” laughter (66), “warrior shriek[s]” (68), “striped and savage” facepaint (232), and “war cr[ies]” (233), but also by their similarities to hyenas (231) and the way they emit “the deadly growl of a beast” (232). The novel is also highly ambivalent toward blackness and Africans. In one passage, Africans are described as “a flowing river of dark beauty and strength” (207), while in another they cause Lana to recall parasites and Satan’s unseen minions (69).

While it largely lacks the distinct Americentrism of novels like *On the Road to Heaven* (“Western-centric” is a better characterization of the novel), *Redemption Road* nevertheless follows another well-established trope in Western narratives—particularly activist narratives—by using the experience and suffering of a white Western character as a “‘proxy’ resembling the self” to mediate the experience and suffering of the nonwhite, non-Western Other.³⁰ For example, the suffering of Jomo, the Kenyan boy Lana befriends, remains at a distance from readers until the end of the novel, when Lana learns that he has been kidnapped, sold, and presumably killed by human traffickers. In its place, however, is Lana’s own suffering for him, beginning with the anxiety she feels over his disappearance, and culminating in the Passion play of humiliation, suffering, and physical harm she receives on her way to confront Jomo’s teenaged kidnapers in the slums near Mama Grace’s school.³¹ Indeed Lana’s suffering for Jomo by proxy casts her throughout the novel as a kind of Christ figure, a parallel that becomes even more apparent after she is stabbed in the stomach “deep and deadly” by Malik, the leader of the gang of kidnapers.³² By drawing this parallel, however, and focusing explicitly on her agony, the novel also distances readers from

the suffering of Jomo, thus enacting a kind of “representational violence” theorist Natalie Goldberg identifies in certain Western activist narratives. For Goldberg, this violence occurs when these narratives, “unable to sustain the tension between cultural specificity and universal humanity embedded in [their] own protest discourse,” retreat to the familiar territory of “western subjectivity as symbol for universal experience” to make their activist plea, thus eliding “the other’s suffering” from the narrative in the process.³³ Casting Lana, therefore, as the expiating Christ for Africa’s problems, and focusing exclusively on her mental and physical anguish for (rather than from) these problems, *Redemption Road* redirects its Western readers’ gaze away from the non-Western object of its activist impulse to something more recognizably Western, thus minimizing the relevance and potential universality of that non-Western object to readers. Indeed, while Lana’s victimized body in the final chapter lies wrapped “like a wounded mummy” in bloody bandages (235), Jomo’s remains markedly absent. In its place, however, is a perfected body, the object of a vision or dream Lana experiences during her recovery. Clean, unscarred, and lacking even the “usual cuts and scrapes” that had characterized Jomo’s body before his death, this body further redirects the readers’ gaze from images of non-Western suffering, once again underscoring its irrelevance to Western audiences and restricting their ability to witness to Jomo’s victimization. Like Lana’s body, it becomes a proxy for Jomo’s real suffering—a faith-affirming balm in the form of an idealized non-Western body inscribed with Western wish fulfillment (235).

Redemption Road, therefore, creates a number of transnational utopian spaces where Western problems and values find resolution and affirmation at the expense of the Other’s visibility. While ostensibly an activist narrative about Africa’s myriad problems—AIDS, poverty, corruption, prostitution, human trafficking—it is, more accurately, a fictional conversion narrative that addresses the spiritual redemption of the Western self by imperfectly recasting it as the temporal salvation of the suffering Other. As Lana contemplates the face of the perfected Jomo, her one desire is to make him the beneficiary of this redemption. Her plan, after recovery, is to “teach him of the things that matter most” and “take him to church every Sunday” to “learn all about Heavenly Father and Jesus” (236). For her—and the narrative itself—Mormonism offers a potential framework for a seemingly egalitarian transnational utopia, a means to the end of the societal plagues that contributed to Jomo’s death. Even so, the future of the utopian space Lana carves out at the end of the novel, while seemingly transnational and progressive, depends on a kind of universal acceptance to orthodox Mormon principles—the Book of Mormon, Sunday services—making Mormonism less a site of egalitarian, heterodox transnational exchange (as it is in *Salvador*) than a simple panacea, a self-affirming vehicle for Western colonial fantasies about the Other’s redemption from its Otherness.

Perhaps the most recent novel to explore Mormonism’s global presence is Ryan McIlvain’s *Elders* (2013), a work that pays particular attention to the hegemonic tensions between Mormonism’s American headquarters and its presence in the global

South. A missionary novel set during the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, it introduces these tensions through the transnational partnering of Elder Passos, a Brazilian from Fortaleza, and Elder McLeod, an American from Boston, who have been assigned to labor together in Minas Gerais, Brazil, a state where “harvests of truly interested investigators . . . were always modest.”³⁴ While temperamentally different and socially incompatible—Passos is serious, ambitious, and often religiously zealous, and McLeod is cynical, rebellious, and doubtful about his faith—the two missionaries make an effort to work together after they meet a couple, Leandro and Josefina, who show real interest in their message. From this effort develops a kind of transnational utopian space based on mutual respect, expressions of friendship, and other positive cultural exchanges, including the swapping of books in their respective languages as a way to help the other improve his language skills, a gesture that suggests the bridging of communication barriers (71, 127). This utopian space is short-lived, however, and breaks down after a major South American soccer championship and the Iraq invasion disrupt their momentum and throw their cultural differences into sharp relief. Of these two events, the looming invasion proves the most divisive, and as invasion becomes increasingly more likely, McLeod begins to “[embody] for Elder Passos some of America’s worst tendencies” (163). He is perceived as “boorish yet haughty, naïve yet cynical, self-righteous despite such obvious cruelty,” traits that ultimately surface when the missionaries’ relationship with Leandro and Josefina sours after Leandro loses interest in their message and, while drunk, accuses McLeod of wanting to sleep with Josefina, an accusation suffused with a transnational subtext (145). For the drunken Leandro, after all, McLeod is a “gringo” who has come to Brazil to “[try] to steal our women” (145). Later, when he repeats the accusation and refuses to let the missionaries into his house to teach Josefina, McLeod turns to violence, burying his “arm . . . elbow deep in Leandro’s stomach” (190). The assault signals the end of the missionaries’ transnational utopian space and serves as a catalyst for future breakdowns of understanding. For Passos, particularly, McLeod’s use of force is indicative of “the American way” of doing “diplomacy of the balled-up fist” (191). Indeed, against the backdrop of the Iraq invasion, McLeod’s violent attempt to gain access to Josefina mirrors the Bush administration’s imperial use of military force to occupy Iraq and acquire more control over the region.

McLeod, to be sure, is an unlikely imperialist. An aspiring Ivy Leaguer and student of history and literature, he nowhere in the novel expresses ardent support for the Iraq invasion or betrays any intense patriotism. Like Kit West in *On the Road to Heaven*, he is largely confused by the anti-Americanism he faces and naïve about the historically imperialist position he occupies as an American missionary in the global South. Furthermore, while he responds to this anti-Americanism with some arrogance (see 210), he is too sensitive and introspective to evoke the cowboy abandon generally associated with the Bush administration and its foreign policy. Far more “imperial” imperialists are McLeod’s fellow American missionaries, Elders Kimball and Sweeney, who hardly socialize with their Brazilian working companions, or Elder Jones, Passos’s

first American companion, who considers poor Brazilian missionaries to be “freeloaders” because they are not able to “[foot] the bill” for their missions like their wealthier American counterparts (38). As McLeod’s superior in the mission’s leadership hierarchy, Passos also proves equally violent, arrogant, and cruel, often using his position of responsibility to undermine McLeod’s earnest—if unorthodox—missionary efforts in order to gain favor with the American mission president who supervises the missionary work in the region. Indeed, despite his disgust with McLeod’s “diplomacy of the balled-up fist,” Passos proves that it is not only “the American way” when he catches McLeod seemingly in the act of defacing his shoes and, in response, beats the “entire right side of [McLeod’s] face” until it is “lurid with darkening spots” (288). In reality, McLeod is simply shining them—a kindly gesture designed to restore goodwill to the companionship—making the assault, like McLeod’s assault on Leandro, not only a rash misjudgment and gross imposition of power, but also another obstruction keeping them from recovering their transnational utopian space.

The image of transnational Mormonism in *Elders*, therefore, is as ambiguous as it is ambivalent. While the novel draws certain parallels between Mormonism’s American presence in Brazil and the US invasion of Iraq, it ultimately refuses to cast transnational Mormonism as an imperial phenomenon defined simply by a strict dialectical tension between an American colonizer and a third-world Other. Rather it looks with ambivalence on McLeod’s place as an American in Brazil, on Passos’s role as a missionary leader with deep anti-American feelings, and on a missionary program that asserts the hegemonic primacy of its message while embracing, as Passos notes, a kind of ironic Marxism in the way it supports all of its missionaries, regardless of nationality or economic situation, with a “vast communal pot” comprised of monetary donations that are distributed equally to all missionaries (38). Indeed, like Passos, who learned in school about “the bottom-line evils of Reagan and Bush and Clinton and Bush,” only to abandon this absolutist perspective later after he had come to know Americans, the novel adopts “Yes, but” as its “mantra” (38). There is the suggestion in *Elders*, after all, that Elder Passos and those who villainize McLeod for being an American, forcing him unfairly into the role of imperialist, are simply performing a kind of imperial work of their own. Even with this suggestion, however, the novel is hardly a deconstruction of imperial readings of Mormon missionary work. Rather its attention to imperial work of all kinds simply underscores the complexity of defining a transnational space with a strong American center. *Elders*, therefore, never fully resolves its ambivalent stance toward transnational Mormonism, using ambiguity instead to reveal the possible threats imperial hegemony and nationalistic arrogance pose in the project of Mormonism’s ongoing expansion into the global South and throughout the world—particularly when these threats become barriers to the development of utopian spaces of transnational exchange.

Conclusion

As these novels suggest, the Mormon novel has the potential to function as a site where writers can address the challenges of framing Mormonism within a global context and negotiate the evolving dynamic between the global Mormon community and its American headquarters. Accordingly, the genre has at times taken ambivalent stances toward both the American and international church, embracing and resisting twentieth-century notions of a centralized understanding of Mormonism as an American church with a distinctively American message for the rest of the world. In doing so, it has engaged and even challenged long-standing assumptions (and anxieties) about the boundaries and gathering places that have historically defined Mormonism's physical, cultural, and ideological landscapes. Indeed, in functioning as imaginative sites where global Mormonism can be worked out toward global utopian ends, including the more ethical adaptation of Mormonism to myriad global cultures, the novels treated in this study demonstrate that questions of Mormon assimilation beyond US borders become, in some ways, even more problematized by questions of cultural hegemony and imperialism. If anything, though, these novels have heretofore fallen short of addressing these questions fully. As *Redemption Road* and *On the Road to Heaven* show, for example, transnational Mormon novels, because of their attention to global Mormonism and utopian change, must be careful in how they promote and project these utopian dreams in order to avoid playing the imperialist unawares. The challenge of the transnational Mormon novel seems to be how to avoid constructing utopian spaces that function simply as another form of colonialist expression that promotes what it understands to be "change" and "social betterment" transnationally while remaining sadly unaware of its own cultural assumptions and prejudices.

How is such avoidance possible, though, when most Mormon novels are being written by white American authors whose transnational ties are decidedly limited? David A. Shuler's thoughts on historical colonialism, international development efforts, and Mormon expansion into developing nations offer some possibilities with application to transnational Mormon novels. As Shuler notes, "implement[ing] change in a cross-cultural relationship is challenging and can even be dangerous," particularly when "the environment and context within which we initiate change . . . is different from our own and is unfamiliar, or worse, unknown."³⁵ For him, the best way for Mormons—or any people—to promote change in the lives of others is to "recognize and respect agency" and be "aware of [personal] motives, predispositions, and areas of ignorance." As Shuler observes, "We must be aware of our impositions, meaning how our cultural values may differ from others we try to help, and how forceful we are, or can be, in influencing their ideas and actions and ultimately their lives. We should question our methods and our assumptions, including any change [to] orthodoxies that have not been humbly and thoughtfully challenged" (281–82). In their efforts to imagine transnational Mormonism and promote global betterment, therefore, Mormon novels must reflect constantly on their cultural work and the

kind(s) of transnational Mormonism they construct and promote through utopian spaces. Furthermore, they must be mindful of the ways they depict and appeal to non-Western Mormons, whose “cultural values” and “Mormon” identities may be radically different from the values and identities of American Mormons. They must be aware also that giving voice to the Other—including the Mormon Other—is always a problematic endeavor. Utopian spaces, after all, are experimental constructs where ideas for social betterment are culturally determined and often ephemeral. What might function as a utopian space for one people might be dystopian for others.

To be sure, it is altogether likely that the next one hundred years of Mormon literature will better reflect the recent international growth of the LDS Church, particularly the experiences of those who have grown up in the Mormon faith in international settings and transnational situations and better understand the needs of their various regions and cultures. Considering the recent increase in number of Mormon missionaries, as well as the LDS Church’s soft stance on legal and illegal immigration, it is also possible—if not inevitable—that even Mormon novels in the United States will begin to be as informed by transnational experiences as the works of writers like Junot Díaz, Edwidge Danticat, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Karen Tei Yamashita.³⁶ Until then, and even after, Mormon novelists would do well to follow Malaysian fiction writer Preeti Samarasan, who suggests that appropriations of the Other’s voice are not necessarily unethical if they are done with empathy rather than with a desire to force the Other to speak as a puppet. As Samarasan writes, “We don’t need fiction to learn to empathize with those who resemble us; the real challenge is to see ourselves—to find those sometimes comforting, sometimes terrifying shared kernels of humanity—in those who are nothing like us on the surface.”³⁷ Writers who wish to represent the Other, she suggests, must seek for “that perfect balance of empathy and distance that is so hard to strike and so satisfying when struck” (224–25). Accordingly, the Mormon novel will likely remain little more than a “subspecies of American literature” if it long resists or overlooks seeking after these “shared kernels of humanity” and continues to present transnational landscapes as America’s foil, a place where American missionaries go to be tried and tested before they return home with honor. Mormon writers, of course, should not abandon missionary stories. However, as they create transnational Mormon worlds, and work out the ethics of transnational Mormonism through utopian spaces, they should strive for more empathy, building on the strengths of novels like *Salvador* and *Elders*, yet also improving on the weaknesses and limits of their visions and rethinking their cultural presumptions. In doing so, Mormon writers may be able to avoid the pitfalls of novels like *On the Road to Heaven*, with its culturally insensitive depictions of the Other, and thus ensure that Mormon literature remains vibrant and relevant to the worldwide Church.

Furthermore, as Mormon novels strive to take a transnational leap, studies on the Mormon novel should also effect a “transnational turn,” following a trend advocated by scholars in the fields of literary and cultural studies who have begun to

use a transnational scope to make sense of the seemingly boundless movements of peoples, goods, and capital across national and political boundaries in the twenty-first century. Critics like Shelley Fisher Fishkin, for instance, writing within the context of the Bush era, have challenged American Studies scholars not to echo a reckless “pro-American nationalism” with their work but rather to promote an “understanding [of] the multiple meanings of America and American culture in all their complexity” by “looking beyond the nation’s borders, and understanding how the nation is seen from vantage points beyond its borders.”³⁸ Specifically, she encourages scholars to open their minds to what American Studies could be “if the transnational rather than the national” was at the center of their work—with the expectation that such a shift in perspective would ultimately foster greater understanding in the cross-cultural border-crossings that constitute America (21, 43). Mormon scholars like Reid Neilson and Bruce W. Jorgensen have already raised awareness about the Americentric predilections of Mormon studies in their call for more attention to the global Mormon experience in order to better reflect the transnational dynamic of the Church. What if such a transnational direction was taken with even the most seemingly Utah-centric works, like Levi Petersen’s *The Backslider*, Jack Harrel’s *Vernal Promises*, or Brady Udall’s *The Lonely Polygamist*? At the center of *The Lonely Polygamist*, after all, is not only a border-crossing relationship between Golden Richards, the lonely polygamist, and Huila Leo, the Mexican wife of his employer, but also the United States’ Cold War experimentation with nuclear weapons testing in the American West, a project with global implications and devastating local consequences. What other transnational elements remain to be uncovered and investigated in Mormon novels? What do these elements suggest about or propose for globalizing Mormonism? Critics who attempt to answer these and other related questions, perhaps, may discover that the Mormon novel is already deeply interested and invested in transnationality—even in works where it seems most indifferent.

Notes

¹ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the official name of the religious group more commonly known as the Mormons. Throughout this article, I will refer to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as Mormons or Latter-day Saints. Also, I will abbreviate the name of the church to the LDS Church, the Mormon Church, or the Church.

² Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 79.

³ Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), 139–40.

⁴ James B. Allen, “Mormonism in Historical Context: An Introduction,” in *Mormonism: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. W. Paul Reeve and Ardis E. Parshall (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010), xxiv.

⁵ Thomas J. Yates, “Count Tolstoi and the American Religion,” *Improvement Era* 42, no. 2 (1939): 94.

⁶ The account of Tolstoy’s interest in Mormonism as “the American religion” can be found in Thomas J. Yates’s “Count Tolstoi and the ‘American Religion’” in the February 1939 issue of the *Improvement Era*. In the article, Yates recounts an evening when Dr. Andrew D. White, US Ambassador to Germany and former president of Cornell University, met with him and related an exchange he had had with Tolstoy about Mormonism in 1892. Portions of Yates’s article were later included in LeGrand Richards’s *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* (1950), an introductory book to Mormon belief and practice popular among Mormon missionaries and church members. Harold Bloom also alludes to Yates’s account of Tolstoy’s words in *The American Religion*, citing them as support for his own claims about the American-ness of Mormonism and its founder, Joseph Smith (see Bloom, *American Religion*, 97).

To be sure, the factuality of Yates’s article has been called into question. Tolstoy’s words are related secondhand in the *Improvement Era* with a space of nearly forty years between the time Yates spoke with White and the time he published his account of their meeting in 1939. As historian Ethan Yorgason notes, “Tolstoy did indeed speak with White about Mormonism. Also he did modestly compliment Mormonism in an area or two. But the supremely flattering assessment of Mormonism and its fortunes is very probably a figment of LDS imaginations.” Ethan Yorgason, “The Shifting Role of the Latter-day Saints as the Quintessential American Religion,” in *Faith in America: Changes, Challenges, New Directions*, ed. Charles H. Lippy (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006), 150. See also Leland A. Fetzer, “Tolstoy and Mormonism,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 6, no. 1 (1971): 13–29.

⁷ Yorgason, “Shifting Role,” 142–44.

⁸ As historian Reid L. Nielson notes, beliefs that “international Church history is too recent to chronicle”; a lack of courses in global Mormonism in universities, particularly in the Utah universities that make up the “hub of Mormon studies”; a seemingly overriding interest “in the foundational periods of Mormonism, essentially the presidential administrations of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young” (1830–1877); a lack of foreign-language fluency; and the incorrect assumption that “international church history lacks the pizzazz of early American Mormonism” have contributed to an “international lacuna in [Mormonism’s] documented past.” Reid L. Nielson, “Introduction: A Recommissioning of Latter-day Saint Historians,” in *Global Mormonism in the 21st Century*, ed. Reid L. Nielson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2008), xiv–xv. Similar disinterest in the worldwide church in other fields of study has likely impeded the development of a more transnational or global perception of Mormonism as well.

⁹ Bruce W. Jorgensen, “Digging the Foundation: Making and Reading Mormon Literature,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 9, no. 4 (1974): 51. In my *BYU Studies Quarterly* review of Angela Hallstrom’s *Dispensation: Latter-day Fiction* (Provo, UT: Zarahemla Books, 2010), the most recent anthology of Mormon literary fiction, I praise its “global vision” and movement away from “stories rooted in the rural landscape of Utah and the American West,” pointing specifically at Paul Rawlins’s “The Garden” and Todd Robert Petersen’s “Quietly” as examples of Mormon short stories that “foreshadow the possibilities of a Mormon fiction more aware of the Church’s transnational experiences.” Scott Hales, review of *Dispensation: Latter-day Fiction*, ed. Angela Hallstrom, *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (2012): 117. In something of a response to my review, however, critic James Goldberg notes that “reviewers have celebrated ‘Quietly’ for engaging with a diverse global Mormon experience, but actually we should be upset with the story for paving over a realistic Mormon experience with outdated clichés.” James Goldberg, “Race, Culture, White Guilt, and Mormon Letters,” *Dawning of a Brighter Day*, April 12, 2012, <http://blog.mormonletters.org/?p=4305>. He continues,

I do not blame readers who felt like “Quietly” was an accurate and engaging depiction of LDS life in Africa. Petersen played to many of the images of Africa that would be familiar to American readers: ethnic genocide, poverty, the ghosts of colonialism—all he’s missing is a corrupt dictator and AIDS! But I do find fault with Petersen for making readers believe he’s kept them in touch with the court floor of the real world when he’s largely been . . . drawing at random from the map of half a continent and sometimes from a mental shelf of clichés.

¹⁰ Jorgensen, “Digging the Foundation,” 51.

¹¹ The one exception to this rule are the stories in the Portuguese-language anthology of Brazilian Mormon fiction, *Aquilo que nos move: Os melhores contos do concurso Parley P. Pratt de contos mórmons, 2010*, ed. Rex P. Nielson and Kent S. Larsen (New York: Edições Samuel Lamanita, 2011), a compilation of best short stories produced for the Parley P. Pratt Mormon Short Story Contest.

This tendency is changing, however. *Dispensation: Latter-day Fiction* (2010), the most recent anthology of literary Mormon fiction, includes stories that take place in Africa (Paul Rawlins’s “The Garden” and Todd Robert Petersen’s “Quietly”) and France (“Salvation”), one of which (“Quietly”) is not a missionary story. Another anthology, *Monsters & Mormons*, ed. Wm Morris and Theric Jepson (El Cerrito, CA: Peculiar Pages, 2011), features a non-missionary story (“Bichos”) set in Brazil.

¹² Throughout the nineteenth century, Mormons engaged in radical utopian experiments in polygamy, intentional communities, cooperative economics, and geographic isolationism. Following the official abandonment of polygamy in 1890, however, Mormons gradually distanced themselves from these experiments and embraced a more

assimilationist stance toward mainstream Protestant America. See Matthew Bowman, *The Mormon People: The Making of an American Faith* (New York: Random House, 2012), 152–54). I call this stance the “post-utopian condition” for the way it comes after an era of utopian experimentation and mutes the radical utopian longings that remain an important part of Mormon identity. In brief, the post-utopian condition is marked by a paradoxical longing to belong to the mainstream but also to be distinct from it. See Terryl L. Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 53–62.

My uses of the terms “utopia,” “utopian,” and “utopian space” are informed by my study of Fredric Jameson’s writings on the subject in *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005). In that work, Jameson defines utopian space as “an imaginary enclave within real social space” that meditates on existing social conditions and enables “Utopian fantasy” to occur (15). Jameson likewise defines the utopian form as a “representational meditation on radical difference” and “radical otherness” that encourages individuals to rethink existing conditions and propose new ways of being. For him, the function of such fantasy and meditation in the processes of real social change is such that “one cannot imagine any fundamental change in our social existence which has not first thrown off Utopian visions like so many sparks from a comet” (xii).

¹³ Because of the existence of novels written by both Mormon insiders and outsiders, the qualifications for what constitutes a “Mormon” novel remain ambiguous to this day. The existence of different Mormon faith traditions independent of the Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also complicates the matter.

Throughout this essay I refer frequently to the Mormon novel as a distinct genre. I do so to understand it as a cultural product of the Mormon people rather than a product that views and treats Mormonism as a thematic concern. In doing so, I seek to distinguish works by and about Mormons from works about Mormons with no cultural or ideological ties to the community. For the purpose of this study, therefore, the Mormon novel is any novel produced by a writer to emerge from the Utah Latter-day Saint tradition that demonstrates an overt investment in Mormonism through content and theme. While this definition remains inadequate on a number of levels—where, for example, would Orson Scott Card’s *Ender’s Game* or Brady Udall’s *The Miracle Life of Edgar Mint* fall in this definition?—it draws a clearer line of demarcation between works like Brady Udall’s *The Lonely Polygamist*, say, and David Ebershoff’s *The Nineteenth Wife*. More specifically, this study understands the Mormon novel as invested in exploring the potential for “post-utopian” cultural work in the genre, or cultural work that seeks to come to terms with Mormonism’s paradoxical desire to be both separate from and a part of mainstream cultures. Even today, that is, Mormon novels—including works by novelists who have left the faith—seem interested in imagining better, more ethical ways to express and implement Mormon ideals. For other ways of thinking about the Mormon novel, see Michael Austin, “The Function of Mormon Literary Criticism at the Present Time,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 28, no. 4 (1994): 131–44; and

Gideon Burton, “Should We Ask, ‘Is This Mormon Literature?’ Towards a Mormon Criticism,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 32, no. 3 (1999): 33–43.

The first Mormon novel was likely B. H. Roberts’s *Corianton* (1888), a fanciful but amateur adaptation of a Book of Mormon story written in the tradition of Lew Wallace’s *Ben Hur*. Before Roberts, however, Mormons rarely dabbled in fiction, largely because Church leaders, including Brigham Young, condemned the novel as immoral. While their distaste for the form was in no way unique to their faith, Mormon leaders were likely unfavorable toward the novel because it frequently served as a vehicle for Mormon propaganda. Most novels about Mormons in the nineteenth century, after all, were anti-Mormon novels written for sensationalistic and activist purposes. For this reason, Mormons were slow to embrace the form until the end of the century, when revolutionary changes within Mormonism, most notably the abandonment of polygamy, created a climate that became open to new and popular ways of expressing Mormon ideas and constructing Mormon identities. Indeed novels from this era, written by those in the Mormon community, were deeply invested in the post-utopian cultural work of preserving Mormonism’s utopian heritage through the popular medium of the novel in order to make space for themselves as newly assimilated Americans. Early Mormon novels, like those written by Nephi Anderson, sought to portray Mormons as a devoutly American people with something unique and transformative to offer their nation.

¹⁴ Rachel Adams, “The Ends of America, the Ends of Postmodernism,” *Twentieth-Century Literature* 53, no. 3 (2007): 250. Specifically, the “global processes” Adams names are “the unprecedented integration of the world’s markets, technologies, and systems of governance; surprising and innovative new forms of cultural fusion; and the mobilization of political coalitions across the lines of race, class, and other identitarian categories” (250–51). Among the “constellation of authors” whose works fit within this framework, Adams lists Jhumpa Lahiri, Sandra Cisneros, Chang-rae Lee, Junot Díaz, Ruth Ozeki, Jessica Hagedorn, Gish Jen, Bharati Mukherjee, Susan Choi, Oscar Hijuelos, and Edwidge Danticat (251).

¹⁵ The relatively small number of writers producing Mormon literature seems almost enough to explain why more novels are not being written that address Mormonism from a global or transnational perspective—especially considering that most Mormon novelists who are able to find publishers for their work come from the United States and have strong ties to Utah and the Mormon Corridor. Coupled with this are market- and audience-related concerns. Of the seven major publishers currently publishing overtly Mormon fiction—Cedar Fort Books, Deseret Book, Parables Publishing, Peculiar Pages/B10 Mediaworx, Signature Books, Strange Violin Editions, and Zarahemla Books—all but three are located in Utah, and these remain in the continental United States and market their products almost exclusively to English-speaking North American Mormon audiences. Furthermore, translations of Mormon novels into languages other than English are particularly rare, with none of the current publishers offering non-English titles or translations of their English-language fiction titles. Under such conditions, the cultivation of a Mormon literary globalism like the kind we see occurring more broadly in

American fiction seems to be on no one's radar. In a sense, the borders between English- and non-English-language Mormon fiction are too impenetrable. Without access to the major works in the Mormon novel tradition in their primary language, international non-English-speaking Mormon writers must learn the complexities of English in order to gain access to the existing tradition and build on it with works informed by their own global perspectives. Furthermore, English-speaking writers similarly lack the resources (translation services, foreign-language skills) needed to benefit from the work of their international counterparts. The infrastructure of Mormon publishing is simply too weak to support such transnational movements and exchanges.

¹⁶ See *The Book of Mormon*, Ether 13:1–12; Doctrine and Covenants 57:1–2; and Articles of Faith 1:10.

¹⁷ Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 22.

¹⁸ Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa," *Massachusetts Review* 18, no. 4 (1977): 783.

¹⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 1–2.

²⁰ Achebe, "Image of Africa," 792.

²¹ Coke Newell, *On the Road to Heaven* (Provo, UT: Zarahemla Books, 2007), 185.

²² See Achebe, "Image of Africa," 792.

²³ Margaret Blair Young, *Salvador* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1993), 32.

²⁴ Robert Bird, "A Mormon Postmodernism: Worlds without End in Card's *Lost Boys* and Young's *Salvador*," *Dialogue: A Journal for Mormon Thought* 32, no. 3 (1999): 57.

²⁵ Young, *Salvador*, 33.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 34. In *The Book of Mormon* (1830), a work Mormons accept as scripture, Jesus Christ visits the ancient inhabitants of America shortly after his resurrection. During his visit, he preaches the gospel to them and establishes a church (see 3 Nephi 11–29).

²⁷ Young, *Salvador*, 154.

²⁸ Even the name "Zarahemla" is misappropriated. Early in the novel Julia characterizes the Book of Mormon city as "a center of peace in our scriptures, a sort of Zion" when it is nothing of the sort (5).

²⁹ Toni Sorenson Brown, *Redemption Road* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2006), 7.

³⁰ Natalie Swanson Goldberg, *Beyond Terror: Gender, Narrative, Human Rights* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 40–41. See also Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19.

³¹ See Brown, *Redemption Road*, 229.

³² Lana is compared to Jesus elsewhere in the novel. “Jesus got his joy in saving souls who were lost and forgotten,” her friend Nygoya tells her. “You are much like Jesus. It is one of the reasons you wish so desperately to save Jomo” (138).

³³ Goldberg, *Beyond Terror*, 41.

³⁴ Ryan McIlvain, *Elders* (New York: Hogarth, 2013), 27.

³⁵ David A. Shuler, “An Ethical Dilemma: The Imposition of Values on Other Cultures,” in *Global Mormonism in the 21st Century*, ed. Reid L. Neilson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2008), 273–74.

³⁶ Already this is happening. In recent years, Mormon novelists in Canada and England have published works about Mormon life outside US boundaries. These novels are Jenn Ashworth’s *The Friday Gospels* (2013), Jennifer Quist’s *Love Letters of the Angels of Death* (2013), and Carys Bray’s *A Song for Issy Bradley* (2014).

³⁷ Preetta Samarasan, “Putting Words in Other People’s Mouths: On Empathy and Ventriloquism in Fiction,” *Michigan Quarterly Review* 46, no. 1 (2007): 217.

³⁸ Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies—Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004,” *American Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (2005): 20.

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