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Abstract Review of *Utah Historians and the Reconstruction of Western History* (2003), by Gary Topping.

Sister Brodie and Sister Brooks

Larry E. Morris

Review of Gary Topping. *Utah Historians and the Reconstruction of Western History.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003. xii + 388 pp., with index. $24.95.

Gary Topping, associate professor of history at Salt Lake Community College and archivist of the Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City, brings good credentials to the researching and writing of Utah history. Former curator of manuscripts at the Utah State Historical Society, he is the author of *Glen Canyon and the San Juan Country* and the editor of *Great Salt Lake: An Anthology*.[1] In *Utah Historians*, Topping treats the lives and writings of an amazing group of historians—Bernard DeVoto, Dale Morgan, Juanita Brooks, Wallace Stegner, and Fawn Brodie—all contemporaries, all with a strong Utah connection, and all of whom wrote about Western and Mormon history. Such a book is overdue because each of the five produced significant work and achieved national prominence. In addition, their interrelation-

Dale Morgan inspired the title for this essay by sometimes calling Fawn Brodie and Juanita Brooks "Sister Brodie" and "Sister Brooks," respectively, and by referring to himself as "brother." Writing to Brodie in 1955, for example, he closed by saying, "I am, Dear Sister Brodie, your bro. in the bonds of faith." John Phillip Walker, ed., *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism: Correspondence and a New History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 87. Morgan made such references with a touch of sarcasm but also with genuine affection, and I do the same.

1. Published by the University of Idaho Press and Utah State University Press, respectively. Publishing with the University of Oklahoma Press, definitely in the top tier of publishers of Western Americana, adds another feather to Topping's cap.

ships influenced their writing careers. Few Western states could boast such an interesting group of historians. Topping, who has studied all of them meticulously, candidly discusses their strengths and weaknesses as historians. He also offers fascinating biographical information. While *Utah Historians* thus has value for readers interested in these historians, Topping undercuts that value by going out of his way to cast the church and its leaders in a negative light—sacrificing sound historical methodology in the process.

"The Niece of David O. McKay"[2]

I would like to focus on Brodie and Brooks because they were both born into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and both produced controversial work on Mormon history. I am interested in DeVoto, Stegner, and Morgan and admire them as writers,[3] but none of the three published books that engaged Mormon historical issues

2. In April of 1951, not long after David O. McKay had been named president of the church, Morgan sent a mock title page of *No Man Knows My History* to Brodie, listing the author as "the niece of DAVID O. MCKAY/PRESIDENT OF THE MORMON CHURCH." Walker, *Dale Morgan,* 187.

3. Not long ago, I pulled down one of the three Bernard DeVoto books on my shelf, *Across the Wide Missouri* (a compelling account of the Rocky Mountain fur trade during the 1830s), expecting to find a colorful and interesting description of pemmican. DeVoto did not disappoint, explaining that pemmican was a mixture of pulverized meat—with the gristle and sinew removed—and melted fat: "It was a splendid high-energy food, a complete diet in itself. It was also a great treat (some cynics dissenting), incomparably richer and more flavorsome than jerky. It could be eaten uncooked or fried, roasted, or boiled, by itself or in combination with anything you had on hand. The luxury article was 'berry pemmican,' into which pulverized dried fruits of any available kind had been mixed." *Across the Wide Missouri* (Boston: Mariner Books, 1998), 164. This is vintage DeVoto. His descriptions of Indian and frontier life are packed with detail and are endlessly fascinating. As Topping points out, DeVoto was a solid researcher who could write well. His work was well received by both readers and critics, and he won both the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize for his Western history. As for Stegner, who also won the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize (but in his case for fiction), one of the most recent novels I've read was his haunting *The Spectator Bird*. I also believe that another of his novels, *Recapitulation*, contains some of the best descriptions of the Salt Lake Valley that I know of. The historian among Topping's fearsome fivesome I admire most is Dale Morgan. I see his *Jedediah Smith and the Opening of the West* as a masterpiece and believe that *The West of William Ashley* is one of the best examples I've seen of thorough research into primary documents accompanied by impeccable annotation.

the way that Brodie's and Brooks's did. (Morgan planned a great work on Mormon history but never completed or published it.) I would like to point out, however, that one of the best sections of Topping's book is his comparison of DeVoto to the great American poet Walt Whitman, noting that "one could easily imagine Whitman's delight if he could have witnessed DeVoto's continental vision, his extravagant language, and his easy trespasses across the boundary lines of literature and history" (p. 79). In parts of the book like this one, Topping demonstrates both his ability to view the past from a refreshing and insightful perspective and his skill as a writer.[4]

Getting back to our duo, we turn first to Fawn Brodie (1915–1981). In taking a closer look at her life, I found several interesting parallels between her background and mine. We both had ancestors who lived in Nauvoo before coming west, ancestors who converted to Mormonism in Great Britain, ancestors who settled in northeastern Utah (hers in Huntsville and mine in Hyrum). In addition, Fawn Brodie is in several ways exactly one generation ahead of me: She was born in 1915, three months before my dad. Her father, Thomas E. McKay, was born in October of 1875, the same month and year as my grandfather. Her first grandchild was born in 1975, months before the birth of my and my wife's first child. Like Fawn Brodie, I loved reading as a child, wrote poetry as an adolescent, got a master's degree in English, and later turned to history. (I wish that, like Brodie, I had signed a contract with a prominent national publisher before turning thirty, but what can you do?)

At first glance, it is natural to assume that Fawn Brodie experienced an ideal Mormon upbringing. Both of her grandfathers, David McKay and George H. Brimhall, the latter president of Brigham

Morgan had unique gifts for both finding forgotten documents and writing beautiful prose—what a rare combination.

4. Even in his treatment of DeVoto, however, Topping editorializes needlessly on Mormonism. Rather than allowing DeVoto to express anti-Mormon sentiments for himself—something he does quite well—Topping insists on labeling Joseph Smith's theology "bizarre" (pp. 64, 86) and on characterizing priesthood authority as "iron" (p. 64). Indeed, Topping uses the word *iron* so often in describing LDS leaders that he manufactures his own cliché (see pp. 8 and 89 for other examples).

Young University from 1903 to 1921, were well respected Latter-day Saints, as were her parents, and she grew up in the McKay home in Huntsville. Her uncle, David O. McKay, became an apostle before she was born and was called to the First Presidency when she was a teenager.[5] But all was not well in the McKay and Brimhall families. In his brief discussion of Fawn's early life, Topping mentions that her grandfather, George H. Brimhall, had been dismissed—unjustly in the minds of some family members—as president of BYU[6] and that her mother, Fawn Brimhall McKay, lost her faith in Mormonism and attempted suicide more than once. All of this was news to me. (I knew of George Brimhall but didn't know he was Fawn Brodie's grandfather.) I was surprised, however, that Topping fails to probe the question of whether Brodie's childhood experiences prompted an early disillusionment with Mormonism that later blossomed into a complete loss of faith.

Nor does Topping inform us that a seriously ill George Brimhall committed suicide (when Fawn was sixteen) or that his daughter—Fawn's mother—finally succeeded in taking her own life (when Fawn was forty-five). Again, Topping says little of the strange living arrangements in the Huntsville home, with Thomas's seven-person family occupying only two bedrooms of the nine-bedroom home, even though the other bedrooms were unoccupied most of the year. (Thomas's brothers and sisters used them during the summer months.) In addition, Fawn's mother had virtually no say in the decorating and upkeep of the home because she was not a voting member of the McKay Family Corporation. Topping does not mention that all of this could be quite meaningful in terms of Fawn's decision to give up her belief. Her "idyllic" childhood (a phrase she herself used) was

5. Fawn's father, Thomas E. McKay, was called as an assistant to the Twelve in 1941. Topping mistakenly refers to him as an apostle (p. 285).

6. Different branches of the Brimhall family tend to view George Brimhall's history and his attitude toward the church quite differently. See Mary Jane Woodger and Joseph H. Groberg (a descendant of Brimhall through a different wife than the one Fawn Brodie descended through), "George H. Brimhall's Legacy of Service to Brigham Young University," *BYU Studies* 43/2 (2004): 4–46.

in some ways quite the opposite of that.[7] In reading of her family circumstances, I felt a good deal of sympathy for her.

'No Man Knows My History'

Fawn Brodie, of course, is best known both in and out of Utah for her biography of Joseph Smith, *No Man Knows My History*. Early in his discussion of this book, Topping reveals much about his attitude toward Mormonism in a single sentence. Speaking of the Book of Mormon, he writes: "What sounds to modern readers like an *ungodly slumgullion* of popular cultural themes designed to address the yearnings of a particular locality at a particular moment turned out to have a widespread and profound appeal" (pp. 290–91, emphasis added). It's hard to understand why Topping, who claims to have "no conscious awareness of ill will toward the Mormon people or the Mormon culture" (p. 11) and whose book was funded in part by Brigham Young University's Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, would choose to characterize the Book of Mormon in such an unnecessarily negative manner.

I went to Mr. Webster for help with *slumgullion*, a word I have certainly never used (nor does my Microsoft Word spell checker recognize it). It is defined as "meat stew,"[8] and the sound of the word conjures up a rather unappetizing stew. Indeed, the words *slum* and *gullion* originally meant "slime" and "mud, cesspool," respectively, an etymology that one would expect a careful writer like Topping to be well aware of. Topping gives us no clue why readers should think of the Book of Mormon as slumgullion. Given its large cast of characters and its complex flashbacks, I can understand how it might be thought of as a collage, and given its close relationship to the King James Bible, I can also see how some might consider it a pastiche, but slumgullion? Topping is clearly taking pains to use highly negative rather than neutral words. Worse yet, he claims these modern readers will also view the Book of

7. See Newell B. Bringhurst, *Fawn McKay Brodie: A Biographer's Life* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 7–44, for an overview of Brodie's early life. Her son Bruce noted that she referred to her youth as "idyllic" (7).

8. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary,* 11th ed.

Mormon as "ungodly." Why would that be true? This is a book that continually speaks of God and Christ in reverential terms. Try opening it at random without seeing a verse or several verses honoring deity. Topping's label is not only biased, it is inaccurate. In this and numerous other places throughout the book, his choice of words reveals a strong bias against Mormonism and indicates that he has a serious ax to grind, not what one would expect from a thoughtful scholar.

Topping again describes the Book of Mormon quite negatively in his discussion of Dale Morgan, calling it a "lurid" tale (p. 144) but offering no explanation as to why that word would be appropriate. If Morgan felt that way, why not quote him? "Ungodly slumgullion" and "lurid" thus reveal much more about Topping than they do about Brodie or Morgan.

Although Topping criticizes all five subjects of this book for various scholarly failings, he basically gives Brodie a free pass in her attack on Joseph Smith. In discussing the translation of the Book of Mormon, for example, Topping mentions that Brodie sees the speed of the process as evidence of Joseph's ability, whereas Latter-day Saint historian Francis W. Kirkham had argued that it was evidence of divine assistance. Topping simply gives Brodie the last word in this debate. In doing this, he does not account for the complexities of the issue. To her credit, Brodie explains that Joseph and Oliver produced a 275,000-word manuscript in approximately ten weeks, a pace that meant averaging 3,700 words a day. Brodie presumes to explain this by insisting that Joseph "had a remarkable facility for dictation."[9] But neither Brodie nor Topping mentions that the extreme difficulty of producing a manuscript of that size in such a brief period of time was compounded by the method of production: Joseph Smith—while looking at the seer stone in his hat and having no access to other source material—dictated the text to Oliver Cowdery in fifteen-to-twenty-word segments; Oliver then transcribed the dictation and read it back to Joseph, who made any necessary corrections before moving on to the next segment (a process no doubt considerably more exhausting

9. Fawn Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), 62.

and time-consuming than normal composition with pen and pad—not to mention computer and word processor).[10] Nor does Brodie or Topping inform us that in the history of American literature, no one is known to have produced a prominent work of similar length in anything close to a ten-week period. But Topping glides past this as if the speed of the translation presents no difficulty for critics. He also ignores the fact that Brodie attempted to escape some of that difficulty with an ill-advised and unfounded speculation that Oliver merely copied some of Martin Harris's text.

Topping also takes Leonard Arrington to task for his criticism of Brodie, saying that Arrington's "opinion of *No Man Knows My History* was uncharacteristically caustic" for a man who was normally "kind and generous" (p. 334). What Arrington actually said is as follows:

> The [Mormon] biography most often referred to by most scholars is Fawn Brodie's life of Joseph Smith, but earnest critics have found many inaccuracies in both fact and interpretation. Despite the evidence of prodigious research, despite the charming imagery of its style and its stirring chronicle of an enigmatic career, the book has two methodological weaknesses. First, it is evident that Mrs. Brodie, who is a lapsed Mormon, not only has little patience with the pretensions of Mormonism, but little appreciation of religious phenomena generally. She refuses to accord integrity to the many men of undoubted intellect and character who associated with the Mormon prophet and believed him to be an inspired leader. Second, Mrs. Brodie was concerned, or at least it would seem, with painting a pen portrait rather than with writing a work of history. The work reads as though she began by studying the historical background sufficiently to formulate what she regarded as a reasonable and believable approach to Joseph Smith and then proceeded to mobilize the evidence to illustrate and support her interpretation. To be sure, these indictments may be overdrawn, but Mrs.

10. See Royal Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 61–93.

> Brodie's colorful adjectives and sometimes damning inferences imply a finality of judgment that is not warranted by the contradictory character of the evidence she examined.[11]

Rather than discussing the substance of Arrington's comments, Topping argues that Arrington is being "caustic." That is ironic because Arrington's judgments are not only right on the mark, they are measured and civil, anything but caustic, with a tone that is perfectly appropriate for a scholarly journal.

Topping likewise dismisses reviews by Hugh Nibley and others with a wave of the hand, calling them "attacks that were heated but lacking in substance" (p. 293). I realize that early Mormon history was not Hugh Nibley's specialty, and I personally wish he had published a serious review of Brodie's book in a scholarly journal rather than a somewhat flippant commentary with Bookcraft.[12] But let's take a look at his criticisms and see if they amount to anything. Nibley starts by objecting that Brodie "first makes up her mind about Joseph Smith and then proceeds to accept any and all evidence, from whatever source, that supports her theory,"[13] which is much like Arrington's second point. As an example, Nibley points to Brodie's assertion that the fortune-teller Luman Walters was a "mentor" to young Joseph Smith.[14] Brodie refers to "press accounts"[15] mentioning Walters, but as Nibley notes, these so-called accounts all originated with one man, newspaper editor Abner Cole—using the

11. Leonard J. Arrington. "Scholarly Studies of Mormonism in the Twentieth Century," *Dialogue* 1/1 (1966): 24–25. Once again revealing his bias, Topping accuses Arrington of being "caustic" when he criticizes Brodie but claims that Arrington "soft-pedals" his discussion of being frustrated with certain General Authorities in his role as church historian. But I believe both are simply instances of Leonard Arrington being his normal diplomatic self. (See *Utah Historians*, 369 n. 8.)

12. Hugh Nibley, *No, Ma'am, That's Not History* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946). For an interesting comparison of Nibley's and Morgan's criticisms of *No Man Knows My History*, see Gary F. Novak, "'The Most Convenient Form of Error': Dale Morgan on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon," *FARMS Review of Books* 8/1 (1996): 137–44.

13. Nibley, *No, Ma'am*, 11.

14. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 31.

15. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 19.

pseudonym Obadiah Dogberry.[16] Even when such rabid anti-Mormons as Philastus Hurlbut, Chester Thorne, and Arthur Deming went searching specifically for damning statements on Joseph Smith from Palmyra neighbors, not a single person mentioned Walters. Nor does Brodie tell us that Cole's first discussion of the contents of the Book of Mormon was rather evenhanded and said nothing at all about Walters or treasure seeking. "We do not intend at this time," Cole wrote, "to discuss the merits or demerits of this work. . . . The *Book*, when it shall come before the public, must stand or fall, according to the whims and fancies of its readers. How it will stand the test of rigid criticism, we are not prepared to say, not having as yet examined many of its pages."[17] In an even more serious omission, Brodie neglects to mention that Cole launched his assault on the Book of Mormon and made allegations about Walters—via a parody called "The Book of Pukei"—only *after* Joseph Smith had confronted him about illegally printing excerpts from the Book of Mormon. Cole's claims are therefore suspicious, to say the least, and Brodie's hasty conclusions are unwarranted.[18]

Another example of Brodie's uncritical source selection is her use of a quotation from Thomas Ford in her discussion of the Eight Witnesses. In a history of Illinois published in 1854, Ford, the governor of Illinois from 1842 to 1846 and the man who abandoned Joseph and Hyrum Smith after encouraging them to give themselves up at Carthage, wrote that Joseph set his followers

> to continual prayer, and other spiritual exercises, to acquire this lively faith by means of which the hidden things of God could be spiritually discerned; and at last, when he could delay

16. For information on Cole, see Andrew H. Hedges, "The Refractory Abner Cole," in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman Madsen* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 447–75.

17. *Palmyra Reflector*, 2 January 1830, as cited in Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996–2003), 2:228. Brodie gives no mention at all of this newspaper article about the Book of Mormon.

18. I believe that Luman Walters was on the scene at various times. Lucy Mack Smith and Brigham Young both seem to mention him, although not by name. However, his exact role and his relationship with the Smith family, if any, remain hazy.

> them no longer, he assembled them in a room, and produced a box, which he said contained the precious treasure. The lid was opened; the witnesses peeped into it, but making no discovery, for the box was empty, they said, "Brother Joseph, we do not see the plates." The prophet answered them, "O ye of little faith! how long will God bear with this wicked and perverse generation? Down on your knees, brethren, every one of you, and pray God for the forgiveness of your sins, and for a holy and living faith which cometh down from heaven." The disciples dropped to their knees, and began to pray in the fervency of their spirit, supplicating God for more than two hours with fanatical earnestness; at the end of which time, looking again into the box, they were now persuaded that they saw the plates. I leave it to philosophers to determine whether the fumes of an enthusiastic and fanatical imagination are thus capable of blinding the mind and deceiving the senses by so absurd a delusion.[19]

Brodie opines that Ford offered "one of the most plausible descriptions of the manner in which Joseph Smith obtained these eight signatures."[20] Is it solid source criticism that leads to this conclusion? Not at all, because Ford's account is weak on several levels. First, Ford's account is late—it was not printed until twenty-five years after the witnesses reported seeing the plates. Second, and most important, Ford did not identify his sources, claiming instead that "I have been informed by men who were once in the confidence of the prophet, that he privately gave a different account of the matter."[21] Brodie even takes the liberty of expanding on Ford's explanation by stating that Ford "knew intimately several of Joseph's key men after they became disaffected and left the church."[22] How does she know this? Despite this posturing, the fact remains that Ford's sources are anonymous, so we have no way of knowing how reliable they are. Third, since we can't

19. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:333–34.
20. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 79.
21. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:333.
22. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 79.

identify the sources, we don't know whether they received their information directly from those involved or from someone who talked to those people, making Ford's version thirdhand at best and possibly even fourthhand. (We have a word for the kind of story that floats from one anonymous source to another—we call it a *rumor*.) Fourth, Ford's account is not corroborated by any reliable sources.[23]

Given all these difficulties with Ford's statement, one wonders why Brodie claimed it is "the most plausible description" of what happened. After all, the Eight Witnesses themselves made a perfectly clear statement, explaining that "Joseph Smith . . . has shown unto us the plates of which hath been spoken, which have the appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated we did handle with our hands."[24] This account is both early and firsthand, trumping the Ford statement by any reasonable historical standard. Nor can it be dismissed as describing a "metaphysical" experience, whatever that might be, because the text itself gives no indication of that whatsoever. Brodie, however, clearly privileges sources that fit with her theory of what must have happened.

Admitting that Emma and William Smith "emphasized the size, weight, and metallic texture of the plates," Brodie speculates that "perhaps Joseph built some kind of makeshift deception. If so, it disappeared with his announcement that the same angel that had revealed to him the sacred record had now carried it back into heaven."[25] To her credit, Brodie has broached one of the key issues related to the coming forth of the Book of Mormon: Did Joseph Smith have real plates,

23. True, Stephen Burnett claimed to hear Martin Harris say "that the eight witnesses never saw [the plates] & hesitated to sign that instrument for that reason, but were persuaded to do it." Stephen Burnett to Lyman E. Johnson, 1838, in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:291. But even if Burnett recorded Harris's statement accurately—and this is a matter of considerable dispute—Martin Harris was certainly not a firsthand witness of what the Eight Witnesses experienced. Nor did he explain, according to Burnett, the source of his information. Therefore, Burnett's letter fails to make any meaningful link to the Eight Witnesses themselves. It falls into the category of rumor (as far as the Eight Witnesses are concerned), and Ford's repeating that rumor would not add up to anything. See Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:288–90, for an editorial note detailing various reports of Martin Harris's statement.

24. "The Testimony of Eight Witnesses," in the front matter of the Book of Mormon.

25. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 80.

fake plates ("makeshift deception," in Brodie's words), or no plates at all? This question deserves careful consideration by those interested in Joseph Smith. Why? A number of honest people claimed to have handled, lifted, or seen the plates in many different circumstances. However, if Joseph created fake plates, as Brodie hints, he would have left a trail of evidence. He had to obtain the material somewhere, he had to have tools, and he had to have a place to work. He had to have created the plates in a specific place at a specific time. Any number of people, including neighbors who later did everything possible to make Joseph look bad, could have seen Joseph involved in these activities. There was one chance after another to catch Joseph in such a fraud. Receipts for purchases could have been written. Tools or fragments of material could have been seen or found. Where did Joseph get the money to do this? Did he have coconspirators? Did anyone mention his or her suspicions—or collusion—in a letter or diary? Anyone claiming that Joseph produced fake plates needs to provide evidence for that assertion or admit there is none and, if that's the case, explain how the theory can possibly be a good one. Likewise, anyone claiming there were no plates at all must account for firsthand testimony to the contrary, from at least fifteen witnesses.[26]

According to Nibley, "here is Brodie's method" of dealing with the fundamental questions regarding the plates: "'Exactly how Joseph Smith persuaded so many of the reality of the gold plates is neither so important nor so baffling as the effect of this success on Joseph

26. Without offering any evidence whatsoever, Dan Vogel speculates that Joseph Smith "*could have* easily set up shop in a cave on the other side of the [Hill Cumorah] or in some corner of the forest. Using a pair of metal sheers, it *would have been* easy to cut a number of 6 x 8-inch sheets." Next, in a shot in the dark that would do Fawn Brodie proud, Vogel muses: "That Smith was unable to finish the plates on the night of 21–22 September 1827 *may be* the best explanation for why he neglected to bring them home." *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 98, 600 n. 66, emphasis added. Of course, such plates would hardly have "the appearance of gold" with engravings having "the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship" ("Testimony of Eight Witnesses"). Vogel therefore makes an elaborate attempt to show that the Eight Witnesses—despite their unequivocal statement to the contrary—never actually saw the plates, only imagined them while feeling them through a cloth. This theory is capably dispatched in Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Attempts to Redefine the Experience of the Eight Witnesses," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14/1 (2005): 18–31.

himself.' Whereupon she drops the question for good. . . . She is simply side-stepping the issue, and the law of parsimony screams bloody murder: it must have an explanation of those plates, but such is not forthcoming from our oracle."[27] In just a few pages, Nibley has revealed serious problems with Brodie's methodology, problems that persist throughout her book.[28] Topping, however, is content to ignore Brodie's deeply flawed source criticism and echo Dale Morgan's laughable claim that Brodie could have eliminated nine-tenths of the criticisms directed by Nibley and others by changing twenty phrases in her book (see p. 293).

Juanita Brooks (1898–1989)

Of the three church members covered by Topping, Juanita Brooks has the distinction of being the only one who remained a faithful Latter-day Saint. As Topping aptly notes, Brooks was "born, reared, educated, and employed in that far-flung outpost of Mormon country along the middle and lower Virgin River in southern Utah and Nevada." She "left her homeland only for brief sojourns and spent her scholarly career collecting sources and writing about little else" (p. 178). Topping adds that "there was an undercurrent of tragedy in Dixie culture, an unspoken memory of the Mountain Meadows Massacre" (p. 185). This undercurrent had a profound effect on Brooks, and in 1950 she published *The Mountain Meadows Massacre*, still the best book yet published on the subject. According to Topping, "Brooks's problem, then, as she worked out her interpretation of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, was the question of why good people do bad things. Her answer, and probably the only answer available to her within a Mormon worldview, was that

27. Nibley, *No, Ma'am*, 13. I find Nibley's discussion of Brodie's faulty use of parallels to be just as convincing as his discussion of her biased selection of sources. See pp. 14–16.

28. Another example of Brodie's biased selection of sources is appendix A in *No Man Knows My History*, which Brodie entitles "Documents on the Early Life of Joseph Smith." Brodie has conspicuously chosen statements from such hostile individuals as Abner Cole, Peter Ingersoll, Lucy Harris, and others that cast the Prophet in a negative light. Firsthand statements from Lucy Mack Smith (the key source on this topic), Emma Smith, Martin Harris, Joseph Knight Jr.—or any other friendly party—are nowhere to be found.

external agents had temporarily clouded the otherwise good judgment and moral rectitude of the people of southwestern Utah" (p. 209).

Convinced that Brooks refused to "follow her sources to conclusions that might embarrass her church" (p. 6), Topping offers his interpretation of the massacre, which he explains in terms of a fundamental flaw in Mormon culture:

> Early Mormonism, and the Mormonism of the frontier of both [John D.] Lee and Brooks, was an enchanted world. It was an apocalyptic world in which signs and wonders abounded, in which people prophesied and worked miracles. Patriarchal blessings loomed over people's lives as the manipulative gods of the Greek pantheon kept dipping into human affairs. Some kind of miraculous manifestation of God's hand pops up, if not on every page, certainly in every chapter. Brigham Young's face lights up with a heavenly glow as he dispenses the word of God; his voice becomes the voice of Joseph Smith as he asserts his authority over the church; fatal illnesses yield to the laying on of hands; people's heads are run over by wagons with no ill effect. And through it all is a profound sense of the End Times, that history is coming to a culmination, that the trumpet of the Lord is about to sound and the sword of the Lord to be drawn, while He dons His boots to trample out the vintage of the grapes of wrath. All this, of course, is readily documented in a multitude of sources, not the least of which is John D. Lee's diaries. There can be no question that the enchanted world of John D. Lee was precisely as Brooks presents it, and that he was willing to serve and to suffer for the church—and to take blaspheming Gentiles into eternity with him—because Lee's head was in heaven while his feet were on earth, and he was zealously eager to bring the kingdom of God to earth. What is curious, though, is that Brooks presents all this with a wide-eyed straightforwardness as historical fact. The absence, in Brooks's narrative, of any external, critical perspective on Lee's enchanted world forces

> the reader to wonder, then, just what was wrong about the Mountain Meadows Massacre. . . .
>
> It seems reasonable to suggest, then, that Brooks's research might have yielded more plausibly to an interpretation based on her Augustinian moments rather than the Pelagianism with which she felt compelled to reconcile it. Instead of giving us thoroughly good people who became suddenly sidetracked by a highly aberrant moment of hysteria and provocation, she might have probed more deeply into the dark recesses of the Mormon psyche, with its festering resentments, its latent violence, and its readiness to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children. Unfortunately, she was unable to arrive at an Augustinian interpretation because of her felt obligation to explain the tragedy in terms acceptable to her church. (pp. 201–2, 218)

In these passages, Topping makes his disdain for things Mormon quite clear. He also psychoanalyzes Brooks based on what he concludes she must have been thinking. Again, his choice of words reveals his attitude: the pioneer world is not *spiritual* but *enchanted*; patriarchal blessings don't *inspire*—they *loom*; deity is depicted not as the *Lord God* who *blesses* but as the *manipulative Greek god* whose hand *pops up*. For Topping, the Mountain Meadows Massacre condemns not only the perpetrators of the tragedy but the entire movement founded by Joseph Smith. One gets the distinct feeling that *festering resentment* is actually a good description of Topping's own feeling toward Mormonism.

There is no doubt that, from any perspective, the Mountain Meadows Massacre is difficult to understand. Any author attempting to interpret the event faces genuine obstacles. Still, Topping could have provided some context. He could have pointed out, for example, that the nineteenth-century Mormon "apocalyptic world in which signs and wonders abounded, in which people prophesied and worked miracles," sounds remarkably like the world of the New Testament, where miracles were common and believers frequently saw the hand of God in their lives—and where the second coming of Christ was believed to be on the horizon. Topping could have also posed the question

of whether similar beliefs concerning God's intervention in human affairs were common among non-Mormon Christians of the time or whether they are still found among Evangelicals, Roman Catholics, and a host of others.

An even more serious omission is Topping's failure to place the "latent violence" of the "dark recesses of the Mormon psyche" in a nineteenth-century context. He could have reminded his readers that such "heroes" as Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, Andrew Jackson, and Wyatt Earp (to name a few) all participated in violent events that we would find abhorrent. He could have reminded us that many Americans had no qualms about massacring innocent people they had classified as outsiders—for example, American Indians. To those of us appalled by Mountain Meadows, such discussions offer no consolation; nevertheless, all of this is pertinent to the dialogue.

Brooks, according to Topping, feared offending church leaders because she was "staring down the barrel of excommunication" (p. 218). Where is evidence for this? Topping offers none. Furthermore, in his biography of Brooks, Levi Peterson discusses visits that Brooks had with such leaders as church president George Albert Smith and First Presidency member Stephen L Richards but never mentions any threat of excommunication. This was true even though Brooks had written an angry letter in which she chided President Richards.[29]

Although Topping admires Brooks and expresses a degree of respect for her work on the Mountain Meadows book, he also shortchanges her by implying that she caved in because of her fear of church leaders and intentionally told less than the truth about the massacre. But in subsequent events not mentioned by Topping, Brooks showed just how fearless she was. When Brooks learned that church leaders

29. Levi S. Peterson, *Juanita Brooks: Mormon Woman Historian* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 219. Nor does Topping inform us of David O. McKay's apparent reluctance to excommunicate apostates, and Brooks did not even fall into that category. Sterling McMurrin, who spoke out against the church in ways that Brooks never did, said that certain church leaders threatened to excommunicate him. According to McMurrin, David O. McKay, then president of the church, offered to testify on his behalf at any church court. See Gregory A. Prince and Wm. Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), 55. McMurrin was still a member of the church when he died in 1996.

had decided to posthumously restore John D. Lee's blessings—another important fact ignored by Topping—she resolved to include a paragraph telling of the reinstatement in her biography of Lee. Although an apostle reportedly exerted pressure, warning that she could be excommunicated and that the reinstatement of Lee's blessings could be rescinded, Brooks did not flinch but went ahead with her plans to publish the announcement. In the end, neither of the threats materialized, and David O. McKay instructed other leaders to leave Brooks alone, something that brought tears to Juanita Brooks's eyes when she heard about it.[30]

Just as he did with Brodie, Topping fails to give full disclosure on these points related to Brooks. This pattern continues throughout *Utah Historians*, detracting from a book that had considerable potential. As it is, however, readers not well acquainted with Mormon history are likely to gain a skewed view of it, while readers who believe in the reality of Joseph Smith's visions are likely to find Joseph's history repeatedly distorted.

30. Prince and Wright, *David O. McKay*, 53–55. See also Peterson, *Juanita Brooks*, 273–84. Prince and Wright's book (which describes President McKay's instructions to leave Brooks alone) was published after Topping's book. Peterson's book, however, tells the rest of the story and was available to Topping, who cites it in other contexts.