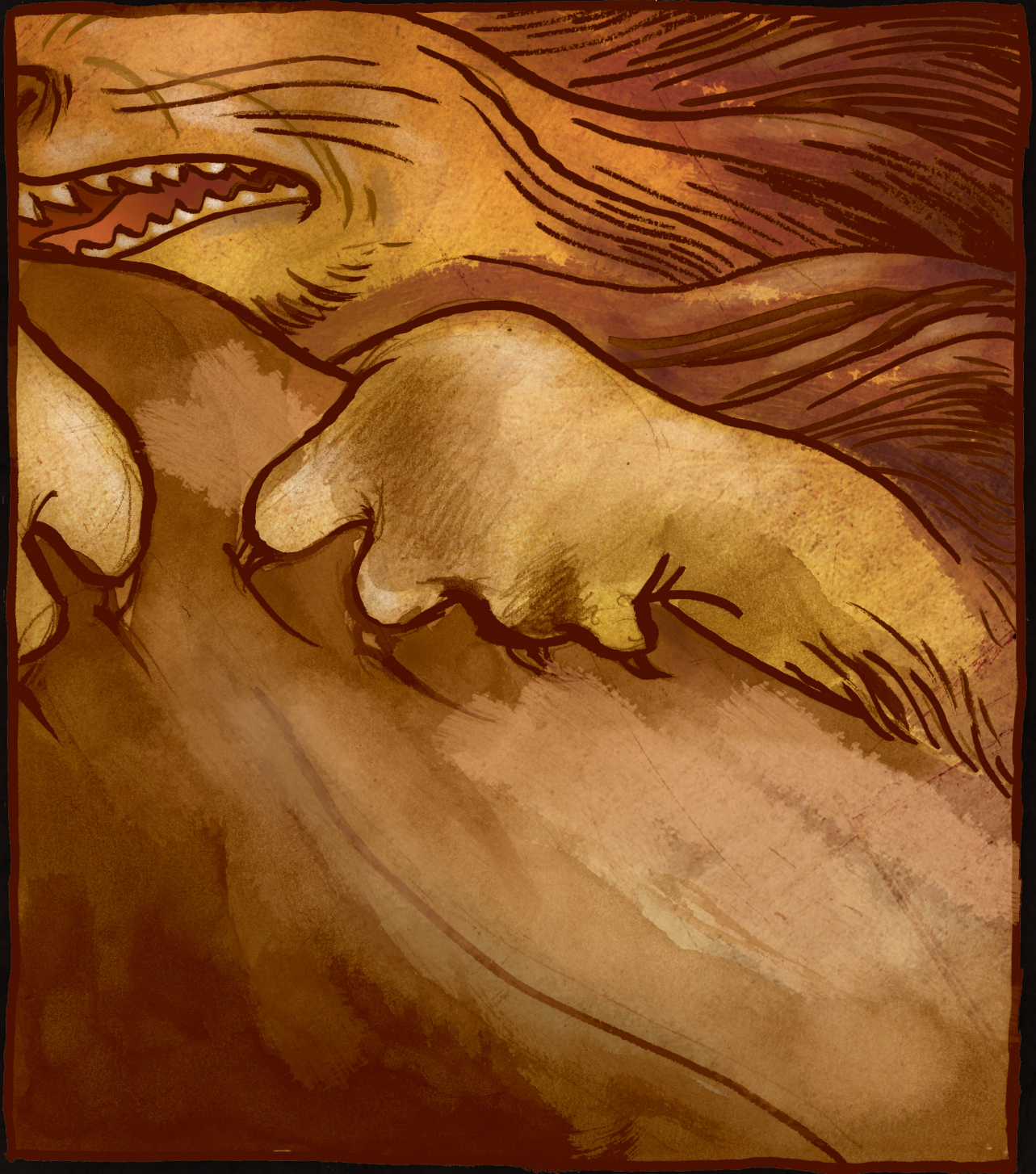


CONTEST ISSUE

WINNERS OF THE YOUNG WRITER CONTEST

mormonartist

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mormonartist

COVERING THE LATTER-DAY SAINT ARTS WORLD

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Editor's Note

or: How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love Mormon Art

BY KATHERINE MORRIS

I recently performed in a staged reading at a fundraiser for New Play Project (see MA issue 1). It was one of those kinds of stimulating theatre events where the cast ends up being larger than the audience, and most of the people who do show up have comp tickets anyway.

But that's not the point of the story. The point of the story is that I, mild-mannered, slightly shy, and nigh unto Molly Mormon that I am, very nearly came to blows with an esteemed member of our audience during the talkback session after the reading. Why? you may be asking yourself. Well, because he made a few remarks about Mormon art that ended in a statement like this: "There is no good Mormon art, and Mormon cinema is dead."

Yikes! This was precisely the moment where I not-so-precisely lost my head and passionately burst out something like, "That is absolutely not true." At which point esteemed audience member snapped a few defensive words back himself, I reacted, and poor Davey Morrison Dillard found his role shifting from discussion moderator to dispute mediator, telling us that maybe we should save our argument for later. Esteemed audience member said jokingly, "I'll meet you by the flagpole afterward" and then settled back into his seat, looking rather uncomfortable.

Of course, by this time, my Mormon guilt had kicked in, and I felt bad that I'd reacted with such hostility toward him. I also felt kind of awkward

that I was wearing his wife's wedding ring, but that's not really relevant to the story.

After the talkback session, I hopped off the stage to meet esteemed audience member, we both apologized (apparently his Mormon guilt had also hummed into gear) and then proceeded to have an excellent, engaging discussion about Mormon art, particularly Mormon film, since he was a film student. It turns out that we had a lot in common, even more than a proclivity for indulging in passionate outbursts in public places.

In fact, what had caused our argument actually stemmed from the same thing. He's been eating his heart out that we don't have a Mormon Steven Spielberg, just as I've been eating my heart out that we don't have a Mormon Chaim Potok (I would've said "Shakespeare," but let's go ahead and preserve the Jewish parallelism here, shall we?). The only difference betwixt this good fellow and me was that his feelings have turned cynical, while mine are overly optimistic and idealistic. A friend of mine once told me that cynics are just disillusioned idealists, or was it idealists who've bumped up against reality? I don't know—it was something really cynical.

Anyway, during this discussion, I realized that this fellow didn't want to be cynical about Mormon cinema. He just hadn't found a reason not to be.

So I told him about some upcoming Mormon cinema events and essentially found myself in the position that *Mormon Artist* as a publication finds itself in: sharing the good news that interesting and downright exciting things are happening in Mormon art.

My experience has been that the more I participate in the Mormon arts community, the more I find reason to be optimistic. And the more I find reason to engage in what's going on in productive ways. Such as having yelling matches with people who disagree with me about Mormon art.

With that long introduction, let's turn to the present issue of *Mormon Artist*, our first special issue and first contest issue. When we published a call for submissions to our Young Writers Contest back in January, a lot of people were confused as to why we limited the age of submitters to under thirty. Part of this was that James Goldberg and I have a feeling that young Mormon artists are engaging their religious culture in ways that are interesting and somewhat different from older generations of Mormon authors. Their experiences are different, and we wanted to explore that.

For example, in the personal essay, "Faith," by Eliza Campbell, we get a glimpse of a theme that is popping up in a lot of younger Mormon authors' writings of recent years: the kind of angst that results from a disconnect between one's own values and the values of one's friends and peers.

In other words, between the values of Mormonism and the values of mainstream modern culture. This disconnect, from what I've observed and experienced myself, tends to find its most intense moments of painful contrast in high school. In this way, Eliza Campbell speaks to the experience of thousands of Mormon teenagers who are figuring out their faith in the pressure cooker of the high school experience.

Sarah Page and Davey Morrison Dillard, with their poems "Coring the Apple" and "Blind Man," continue the tradition of setting biblical scenes to verse, casting these stories in the light of Mormon understandings about the story of Adam and Eve, as Boyd Petersen explicates in his essay response to the two works. But with "Adam and Eve," we have a modern twist on the biblical tale.

In Tyler Chadwick's poem, about a protagonist who meets a man in a red jacket during an early morning jog, we have a very urban experience. While the experience itself could be compared to works by older generations of Mormon authors, the very urban setting is indicative of a shift from a tendency toward setting Mormon narratives in small town Wasatch front spaces to urban spaces.

There also seem to be larger numbers of young Mormons writing from multicultural perspectives. Although the piece was not a part of the contest, we chose to include James Goldberg's "Tales of Teancum Singh Rosenberg," a made-up multicultural Mormon folktale, to represent this trend.

In this issue you will read works by young authors, some short interviews with them about their works, and some short readers responses. Some of the responses are more academic, some by people who've never met the author, and some by people who know the author well. In this way we hope to do several things: First, to present examples of some good Mormon writing by young Mormon authors to show that—though none of them is a Shakespeare yet—there is reason to be hopeful; second, to show serious readers engaging these works thoughtfully and seriously; and third, to encourage Mormons to keep creating and keep encouraging others to create. ■

Introduction

Making Decisions, Finding Direction: How This Issue Came to Be

BY JAMES GOLDBERG

In January, *Mormon Artist* sent out a call for submissions: we wanted short stories, poems, and essays from LDS writers under thirty. We had prize money for our favorite three entries and were willing to publish our top five. We didn't know quite what to expect. Would anyone even respond? What would the entries look like? All we really knew, in fact, was that people have been talking about the future of Mormon art for a long time—and that we at *Mormon Artist* wanted to find out more about its present form and condition. We wanted to show ourselves and our audience what's happening among younger writers right now.

Word got out and we did get an encouraging number of submissions, especially in the poetry category. We were impressed by the genuine feeling in them, by the way writing seems like an integral part of life for young LDS people from a wide range of areas and backgrounds. How many poems, we wondered, are written on any given Sunday across the Mormon world? How many Latter-day Saints, growing up on the poetry of scripture, learn to think about their own lives in poetic terms? How deep does the rich, grass-roots vein of LDS artistic expression go?

Reading the submissions would have been a simple and wonderful experience—except that we had to pick winners. If you've never judged a contest, you might not realize how complicated a process that can be. In order to decide which piece of writing is the "best" or most worth publishing, you have to decide what you think artistic writing most needs to do. After reading, judges have to find a way to talk to each other about what seems most worthwhile, and more importantly *why*.

Many of the submissions we received were sincere and direct personal statements of faith, values, and testimony—which is great, unless you're trying to decide whose testimonies are worth two hundred dollars. And which testimonies should you publish—her belief in prayer, his goals for his future? These pieces were good in the most significant sense: they expressed goodness. Wasn't that what we wanted? And yet how could we choose?

A few entries were totally different in approach. Instead of sharing ideas and beliefs we immediately

recognized, they made familiar things seem strange and new. Davey Morrison Dillard's poem, for example, gave us a Jesus who was bizarre, who put mud on a blind guy's face, instead of the glowing and serene Jesus we're familiar with. Eliza Campbell gave us a Jesus who lived in the television set, defined not by a holy, but by an electronic glow. And we, as judges, were surprised and a little awed with the narrators when they found healing through these strange men, these unexpected Saviors.

The trouble with having the truth, in my experience, is that it can be easy to get numb to it. During my mission, for example, I would often lose focus when translating during meetings from German to English; it was so easy to simply repeat the kinds of phrases I'd heard in church thousands of times before that sometimes I'd forget to stop and think again about what they meant. This is also the problem with the standard lists of Sunday School answers: they are true, but hearing about them doesn't always have the power to snap our minds out of cruise control.

Is this why the Book of Mormon begs us so often to remember—since our minds can tune out things precisely because they are so familiar to us?

The pieces in this magazine were chosen because they made old truths look different enough to wake us up emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. They invited us to deepen our relationships with gospel truths by making us really think and feel about them again, even after we stopped reading.

Perhaps this is what we, as a gospel community, most desperately need from art today. We have a great deal of art designed to represent us, to stand for things we already know well. We need more art designed to surprise and engage us, art that reintroduces us to the known, that shows us how much we have yet to understand about it.

As can be seen in this special issue, that kind of art is a part of the Mormon present—and if we value and foster it, can be a greater part of the Mormon future.

** This essay owes a great deal to Viktor Shklovsky's 1916 essay "Art as Technique."*

About the Authors

GIDEON BURTON is Assistant Professor of English at Brigham Young University where he teaches rhetoric, Renaissance literature, and courses in Mormon studies. He is the editor of the Mormon Literature & Creative Arts database and past president of the Association for Mormon Letters. He and his wife have four sons and live in Springville, Utah.

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TYLER CHADWICK is a PhD candidate in English and the teaching of English at Idaho State. His poems have appeared in *Dialogue*, *Irreantum*, *Salome Magazine* online, and *Black Rock & Sage*, from which he won the Ford Swetnam Poetry Prize in 2009 for his poem "Submerged: Two Variations on Serrano's Piss Christ." He's also a runner, a blogger at Chasing the Long White Cloud, and a contributor to the Mormon arts and culture blog A Motley Vision. He lives with his wife Jessica and their three daughters.

KATHERINE COWLEY is a master's student at Brigham Young University studying English with an emphasis in rhetoric and composition. For her undergraduate degree she studied humanities and film. She has worked on several LDS documentaries, including *Sisterz in Zion*, and has given presentations on LDS film, connections between literature and film, and using new media to teach.

DAVEY MORRISON DILLARD is an undergraduate student studying theatre and media arts at Brigham Young University. A founding member of the Grassroots Shakespeare Company and a member of New Play Project's artistic staff, Davey has had a number of scripts produced for the stage and screen, and several of his poems and essays have been featured in various publications. Davey currently lives in Provo with his wife Bianca.

JAMES GOLDBERG was a founding member of New Play Project and is working toward an MFA in creative writing at BYU. He writes three blogs: a stirring true account of his life at goldbergish.blogspot.com, scriptural commentary and church history at mormonmidrashim.blogspot.com, and thoughts on ethnic and family histories at caucajewmexdian.blogspot.com.

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BOYD PETERSEN is the program coordinator for Mormon Studies at Utah Valley University and is currently serving as the president of the Association for Mormon Letters. He is the author of *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life*.

NICOLE WILKES recently completed a master's degree in English literature at Brigham Young University. She has presented at the Jewish American and Holocaust Literature Symposium and the North American Levinas Society. She currently divides her time between teaching at BYU and raising her five-year-old daughter. Nicole and James Goldberg were married in October.

"Blind Man"

Honorable Mention

BY DAVEY MORRISON DILLARD

"Mud in your eye and a beam in theirs." That's what he told me, the much talked-of Stranger, when I was led to meet him, stumbling across the unseen jagged terrain which had long since been made familiar in my heels' most battered memory.

I did not understand why he spit into the dust, why he sullied my already imperfection, adding blackness unto blackness; nor, in wonder (or in, perhaps, confusion) did I question.

And when I washed—I cannot express how very like a paradox it was, darkness cleaving unto darkness until the faintest morning break of light trickled into my newly rendered irises

and I had to shut them for the blindingness of seeing; for the moisture which was entering and exiting without and within, as one too young for walls.

And so, I tell you, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: but one thing I know, That once I was blind and now I see. ■



Interview with Davey Morrison Dillard

BY KATHERINE COWLEY



What was the process of writing “Blind Man”?

Usually I write a poem in one sitting, spending a half hour to an hour just letting the words flow. I like to write poems with a paper and pen, in a place where I can feel peaceful, often outside. Later I make some minor changes when I go back to type it up—a few words, some differences in punctuation or line breaks, usually only a handful of changes more noticeable than that.

What I like about poetry is that it’s sort of like music with words—I like to sit down with my guitar and try to find new combinations of notes until an interesting melody or chord progression appears; so, with poetry, I like to sit down with a central image or idea or metaphor and let the words and the sounds and the ideas and the emotions take me where they will. It can feel a lot more freeing sometimes than writing something longer or more structured, like drama or fiction, where you have to think about plot and setups and pay-offs and sort of left-brained things like that.

Poetry is beautiful because it’s one of the most direct and honest means of expression. Reading old poems often tells me a lot more about who I was and what I was thinking and feeling at the time of writing than any journal I’ve ever kept.

What initially interested you in the story of the blind man in John 9?

I was reading and re-reading the Gospels last year and was fascinated by the idea of Jesus as a

real human being, who lived and breathed and walked around and told jokes and made people smile. Sometimes it’s very easy to forget the most sacred thing about Christ—that He was human.

With that way of looking at things, I was very interested in thinking about how the other characters in the stories experienced Jesus—what they thought of Him, how they saw Him, and why. I especially love the story in John 9. It’s incredibly poignant reading that chapter from the blind man’s point of view—he hears the conversation between Christ and His apostles, he’s told by someone he’s never met to do the most ridiculous thing (put mud over his eyes and wash it off) without even being given a reason. He does it in one of the most profound acts of faith ever recorded, and, miraculously, he’s healed.

And the testimony he gives—the one that concludes the poem—is one of the most beautiful found in all of scripture. He doesn’t know Jesus is the Messiah—the thought had probably never even entered his mind—but he knows that he was healed. He testifies, and he doesn’t back down from his testimony, even when he may have been beginning to realize how politically dangerous it was to hold to his story. He was healed, and the only way he could show the gratitude he owed was to honor and testify of the healing. That’s a wonderful testimony because it’s so incredibly personal.

And then there’s the other profoundly moving moment in the story, which occurs after my poem ends, when he’s in the streets and he hears Jesus talking and recognizes the voice of the man who

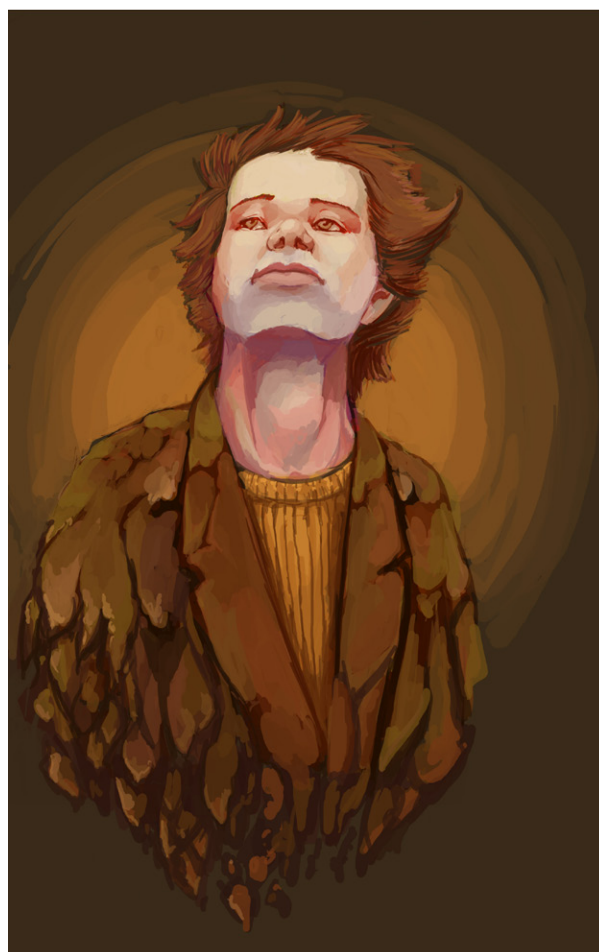
healed him. What an incredible moment for him and for us. It's just a beautiful story, and beautiful storytelling. I think I can relate to that blind man more than I can relate to almost anyone else in the scriptures.

Why did you choose to express yourself in poetry? What about the story of the blind man was conducive to the form of a poem?

Well, in some ways I suppose I feel like I couldn't write a film about it because it's already been written. Martin Scorsese ends *Raging Bull* with the blind man's testimony that also ends my poem (if you're going to rip off, rip off from the best). Seeing that film deeply humanized the scriptural story for me. It's not a movie a lot of members of the Church will want to watch, and that's understandable, but I think it's a very moving and very powerful testimony.

Other than that, I chose poetry for a couple of probably less interesting reasons. First of all, I was writing a lot of poetry at the time, so I was in the groove. And I also just felt naturally that what I had to say about the story was inherently more conducive to poetry than to a traditional dramatic arc.

We all know what happens to the blind man, and I really don't have anything to add except perhaps something to underline the insight in that pure moment of testimony—the humility of it, the faith. What a strange and beautiful story it really is—an amazing metaphor when he is asked to sully his eyes, which are already blind, and it is only after he does so and is washed clean that he is able to see, that he is perfected. Any one of us who



has felt imperfect, fallen, or unclean can relate to that. Anyone who has been baptized, anyone who has been made clean by their Savior, physically or spiritually, can relate. That's the story of the Atonement. That's the Plan of Salvation, all in that amazing little story. ■

Essay on “Blind Man”

BY KATHERINE COWLEY

The first time I read “Blind Man,” it took my breath away. As I read the poem aloud, I felt like I was not just quoting someone else’s words, but that I myself was the speaker—the imperfect soul blessed by Christ even though I don’t always have faith that I can be healed.

The power of the poem is that it comes from the perspective of a far-from-perfect speaker who’s near the beginning of his path but still is given a miracle, still experiences Christ’s redeeming power. The beginning lines of the poem reflect the speaker’s position through language that emphasizes the trivial rather than the power of God. Insignificant words like “that” and “which” are placed in positions of rhythmic emphasis at the ends of lines. Then the poem shifts focus, emphasizing words like “dust,” “imperfection,” “blackness,” “confusion,” or, in sum, the strangeness of having mud applied to the eyes. We as readers, like the blind man, question how the Master shapes us unable to see beyond our narrow-minded expectations.

The enjambment—lines ending without punctuation, without closure—moves us forward through the reflections: a soliloquy of self-exploration, self-questioning, and self-learning, a contrast to the dialogue with the Pharisees found in John 9. The translation from dialogue to monologue is key to the poem—this piece of LDS art is not about defending Mormonism to the “other;” it’s about strengthening and understanding ourselves.

Some of the best new LDS art is like “Blind Man.” It’s not about presenting a polished, epic happily-ever-after. It’s about experiencing the imperfect strivings of others as we go about our own imperfect strivings as parents and spouses, as nursery leaders and teachers, and as neighbors and friends. And in our strivings, the Lord blesses us with miracles. Religious art is valuable when it helps us work through our doubts and reminds us that we are not perfect, and that no matter how hard we strive, Christ will always be saving us from our blindness. ■

"For the Man in the Red Jacket"

Honorable Mention

BY TYLER CHADWICK

...the waters are come in...

—Psalm 69:1

His word, more than his face, remains,
trailing me as the rain that stuck
to my glasses and soaked my clothes,

seeping through
my windows, my façade into
the crawlspace of my memory.

I see now he was serious: as we'd
passed on the street, each moving
the other way, he'd pulled off

his red jacket hood and tried
to make eye contact. *Have you
necessarily taken the time,*

he'd asked, *to find out
what grace is for?* Reluctant
to break the rhythm of my run,

I'd turned just enough to see him
in my periphery, standing alone
on the corner as the rain started,

and said nothing. If he'd asked for money
or the time, I might have slowed, at least
to tell him I didn't have any or

*It's six twenty-two. But grace, I
remember thinking. Get serious, brother,
and out of the rain. It's early. I'm*

*running. We're about to be wet
and our garments as heavy as Genesis.
Of course I've made time for grace. ■*

Interview with Tyler Chadwick

BY TY CAMPBELL



What was your process for writing “For the Man in the Red Jacket”?

I crossed paths with the man in the red jacket early June 2008 during a morning run through the streets of Ogden, Utah. Our brief encounter consisted of me running past him with a slight nod and him stopping to ask me a question: “Have you necessarily taken the time to find out what grace is for?” I imagine he was a transient yearning for some company, holding onto a question that someone had, perhaps, recently asked him, words that had offered him a source of hope. And though I didn’t stop to give him an answer (for any number of reasons), his question struck me with some force, so much so that I just couldn’t shrug his appearance off, as I have so many similar encounters, and I wondered if by being hospitable to this stranger’s words I was actually entertaining an angel sent to renew my devotion to God (see Hebrews 3:12).

Whatever the case, his question hung around for a while before it faded into the crawlspace of memory; but not before I’d blogged about the experience (something I did as soon as I finished my run that morning) and written what now stands as the first two stanzas of the poem (something I started, I think, just moments after the encounter as, increasingly rain-soaked, I made my way home).

What about your internal thought processes led up to making the moment you captured in the poem so poignant?

The year leading up to this “revelatory” run in the rain was a challenging one in the Chadwick household. The previous June, on Father’s Day, in

fact, my dad had a heart attack (what a present that was for him!), something that sent me into a bit of an emotional tailspin.

Then, in November, we discovered a leak in our roof, but not before rain had seeped through one of our walls into the living room and we had to rip out the water-logged sheetrock on the wall and ceiling to find the leak and then figure out how to fix a hole in an asphalt and gravel roof for almost no money (because, well, we had none to spare on house repairs). Needless to say, we spent that winter with a tarp-covered roof because you can’t very well make roof repairs when it’s too cold and wet and snowy for the repairs to take and when you have no money to make the repairs anyway.

During all of this I was going to school, working on my master’s degree through National University, my wife was working full time in a bank’s mortgage department, and we were expecting daughter number three.

Then, the following January—and here’s the real kicker—she was laid off just days before the baby was due. With no income, no insurance, a leaky roof, etc., we felt we were at wit’s end. With some divine help, we worked out our insurance issues in time for our daughter’s birth and, almost six weeks after she’d lost her job, my wife was hired by the Church’s real estate department. And I thank God for that.

I’m convinced the only way we made it through this time was with an overflowing helping of grace, something I still feel like we didn’t deserve. But that’s one thing grace is for, isn’t it: to fill in where we’re lacking? So, when the man in the red jacket asked me last summer if I’d taken the time to find out what grace is for, it stuck because grace was already on my mind.





How do you feel your faith has influenced your writing? Do you feel that it has freed or constrained your creative expression? How?

My experience and faith as a Latter-day Saint has definitely defined the way I approach my poetic vocation, especially my understanding of and approach to language. The more I study the gospel and become acquainted with God through his own words, given to us in our weakness, through human language, the more I realize the power of words, as illustrated in our Mormon literary heritage in which our wordsmith forebears felt genuine anxiety and deep convictions about the postmodern subjectivities of language; yet, in the words of Eugene England (from his commentary in *Harvest: Contemporary Mormon Poems*), they “retain[ed] faith in its ability to communicate shared insights across time and space, based on their conviction that speech ultimately is connected both to the material universe and to our own minds because God is the creator of that universe and illuminates our minds” through language. And therein, I think, lies the power and virtue of words and the Word of God, as conveyed in this slight paraphrase of God’s words as given to Joseph Smith when the Prophet was in Liberty Jail:

“No power or influence can or ought to be maintained by virtue of the [acts of language], only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned; by kindness, and pure knowledge, which shall greatly enlarge the soul without hypocrisy, and without guile—reproving betimes with sharpness, when moved upon by the Holy Ghost; and then showing forth afterwards an increase of love toward him whom thou hast reproved, lest he esteem thee to be his enemy; that he may know that thy faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death.” (D&C 121:41–44).

In this sense, I believe, my faith both frees and constrains my creative expression (I don’t see the freedom and constraining of expression as mutually exclusive enterprises)—constrains it in that my commitment to such a theology, such a God compels me to use my language responsibly, to refine it according to the needs of my audience, my community, in such a way that it bears the greatest influence; and frees it in that this movement toward a more refined personal rhetoric allows me (though not without much effort) to say the things I want to say in the best possible way, to textually capture experience, and to wield the power of words in mind- and soul-expanding ways. At least that’s my hope. ■

Essay on “For the Man in the Red Jacket”

BY TY CAMPBELL

Ten years ago this October I felt pulled from a daze like coming out of anesthesia. I was on my mission, and I had been in the field for one month. It was a warm October. The Japanese maples looked on fire with color.

My companion and I were in an old suburb of Kyoto with old streets that only fit one car and with houses that smelled of old moss and wet rock. I could barely understand the language.

In the middle of our meandering as we tried to get people to talk to us, we approached a little old man with a tanned, wrinkled face and gray-white hair who stood in his garden. We greeted him and he lifted his head from his task to look at us.

Without listening to any of our words, he said directly to my eyes, “Be good.” It was a very short sentence, and I can’t even recall if it was in my native tongue or his, but that short, seemingly ordinary phrase answered so many latent questions that I had not wanted to ask myself.

My first thought was “of course I am trying to be good.” But I never responded verbally to the old man. The man’s tone, his expression, his confidence, and the power of his words took any reaction of rebellion from my mind. Our conversation lasted thirty seconds, but I can still remember his tone, the power in what he said. Years later those words still come to my mind periodically. “Be good” has become one of those standards that I measure myself by year in and year out. It is one

of my constant quality assurance checks. This is exactly what I thought of when I read Tyler Chadwick’s poem. “Have you made time for grace?” is one of those questions that you can probably respond to with a “yes,” but upon reflection you ask yourself, “Have I made *enough* time for grace?”

When I thought about the poem, the question and the answer of “For the Man in the Red Jacket” kept giving different meanings. Eventually I settled on the one answer that made the most sense to me. Sure I have made some time for “grace” or God or sacred things, or at least I think I have, but is that enough? The question is the answer. The point is to keep asking. Was the poet running in the rain because of a sacred natural communion that can occur, or was it because that is when exercise was scheduled? Do we make “time” for grace out of blind habit, duty, or desire?

These are questions that I am excited for LDS authors to be asking. I am excited for LDS artists to push the meaning of the common, the uniqueness of the banal and everyday. Tyler Chadwick and other artists like him have an eye for the real, for the sustained effort that life requires. This is what helps audiences understand themselves. This is what gives our unconscious thoughts, feelings, and anxieties real expression. This is what gives us a common humanity. Such writing is refreshing. Not only in its style and topic, but in that I take a deeper breath when I finish the last line. ■

"Coring the Apple"

Third Place

BY SARAH E. PAGE

*Instead of the thorn,
Hast thou found honey?*

I would like to ask Eve someday
What she saw in the apple.

Before she chose
The fire-stung glory of mortality,
Did she pause for even the space of a breath,
Tremble at the bruise of pain, the sharpness of the briar?
Perhaps she sensed the hope nestled star-like
In the core of the fruit,
And so risked all she was for the quickening—
The promise of the seed dreaming deep in the loam.

I would like to ask Eve someday
What she saw in me. ■

** The first two lines are taken from
Isaiah 55:13 and Proverbs 25:16*



Interview with Sarah E. Page

BY BOYD PETERSEN



Talk about the process of writing “Coring the Apple.” What was your inspiration?

My inspiration for the poem came, in large part, from Robert Frost’s poem, “Never Again Would Bird’s Song Be the Same.” Frost’s poem startled me with its description of Eve as a being both lyrical and softly eloquent, and it inspired me to explore a new facet of Eve in my own poem.

Describe the writing process. How many revisions did you make?

The creation of the poem was hardly instantaneous; rather, it was a gradual process that took several days of shuffling and scratching out words until I felt—or at least I hoped—that there was a sense of wholeness and coherency to the piece.

What drew you to the Adam and Eve narrative as a source for your poem?

Sir Thomas Browne stated, “In one graine of corne their lyeth dormant the virtuality of many other, and from thence sometimes proceed an hundred eares.” This idea of virtuality is what drew me to the Adam and Eve narrative.

In “Coring the Apple,” I was trying to get into Eve’s head, to see the apple through her eyes and explore what sublime and terrible vision drew her hand to pluck the fruit and become mortal. Too often the focus is on what happened after or as a result of the Fall. I was trying to imagine what hap-

pened right *before* the Fall, because in my opinion, the internal conflict Eve went through to reach a decision is equally as important as the consequences of her choice itself. Why? Because I believe Eve’s choice reveals us—humanity’s potential. What she saw in the apple had worth, and we should never forget that.

Or, as Sheri Dew states, “Eve, for the joy of helping initiate the human family, endured the Fall. She loved us enough to help lead us” (“Are We Not All Mothers?” *Liahona*, Jan 2002, 112–14).

The other idea I try to examine in my poem is foretaste. Before Eve bit the apple, I wonder if she had a foretaste—an anticipation—not only of the pain and pleasure mortality would hold for her, but also of the promise mortality held for us that had *nothing* to do with her.

Are there other scriptural narratives that have inspired your creative imagination?

Yes. I am especially drawn to narratives that involve divine sustenance, such as the Lord feeding the Israelites in the wilderness with bread raining from heaven. Manna means “What is it?” With the title of my poem, I am trying to ask the same question about the apple and what it meant to Eve, and consequently, what it should mean to us as individuals and to humanity as a whole.

The first two lines are combined in an interesting way. What do these mean to you, and what was your motive in putting them together?

In D&C 29:39, we are told that we would not know the sweet if we never had the bitter. By combining these two lines, I was trying to ask Eve if she believed that the sweetness of her choice surpassed the bitter sting of the thistles and thorns—both physical and spiritual—that also arose as a consequence of the Fall. It could be argued that she answers my question in the poem in Moses 5:11—

And Eve, his wife, heard all these things and was glad, saying: Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient.

My motive in putting the two verses of scripture together was to experiment with the scriptures as a source for “found poetry,” which takes words and phrases from other sources in order to create a new piece.

As Latter-day Saints, we are constantly told to “liken” the scriptures unto ourselves, and I believe that found poetry offers one such way to discover new poignancy and personal relevancy in each and every word. ■

* This piece is discussed in Boyd Petersen’s essay on “Adam and Eve” on page 27.

"Faith"

Second Place

BY ELIZA CAMPBELL

Why start? Why stop? Why tempt the knowledge, or idea of knowledge? I am thinking these questions as I lie in a leather chair by the window upstairs: lying there immobilized once again. Why turn to the unknown, igniting the body? Why turn to the known, inflaming the mind? Why do people continue to believe? Why do they continue to not believe? Why don't people understand? I shift in my chair as I wonder. Through the high window, the winter evening-nights prove more beautiful and arresting than any flame I can imagine. I have a tendency to listen to Jeff Buckley, listening again and again as his high and floating voice pounds through the walls of my doubt, echoing downstairs in the gentle evening.

I used to think these questions to myself quietly at church, as softly as possible. I whispered the questions to myself as I took up the sacrament in my chubby pre-adolescent hand. I asked those questions as I looked at the faces of the ones who didn't pay attention in Sunday School, and who later broke the codes, leaving me behind.

The first time the questions became loud was that bleak February afternoon when I was fifteen; I was fifteen and everything was bleak, bleak, bleakness as far as I could see. I asked those questions as I first felt the tears come, as I looked out the window into the arresting night and into the arresting possibilities of questions, looking again deeply with pain and fear because my best friend was calling to tell me that she was drunk again.

This is an essay about faith.

I was sitting in a church basement, without emotion, because when you're a kid, emotion is negotiable. Or rather, emotion is too consuming to be a condition: you cry, or you don't cry. But when that crying starts to symbolize something lost, something unattainable, something that no grown-up can give, that is when the faith begins to shove its way through your skin. I cried in this way on an Easter Sunday when I was seven. We were in the seminary room, watching a glowing Jesus movie with the lights turned off. The room was terribly dark. I always thought of Jesus as a fluorescent light: grown-ups were always turning him on and pushing him in my face. He was the color of yawning: he flickered assurance. And he buzzed, a soft irritating buzz that was constant in whatever room he possessed. But that Easter Sunday, I watched the TV and Jesus was hurt.

I watched as Jesus was hurt. He was hurt so badly. White flesh shakes, vinegar-robed filth, bloody scalp. It was disgusting, unreal. I reached out to turn him off, to create the wall of fiction between him and me, but suddenly it didn't matter that he was a lightbulb, or that I was watching a movie, because the feelings I had were too real to ignore. I realized somehow that there were some kinds of pain in the world that would never be taken away. And I looked around to make sure the room was dark enough, and that no boys were looking at me. And then I cried softly, bitterly, hot steaming tears in the black, black room.

There is truth. There is pain. There is two nights before Thanksgiving, in the cold. My mom



D. WILSON

was principal of a middle school, one that had been neglected, underfunded, and segregated: one that had been allowed to bow to crushing unfairness. At least half of her students lived at or below the poverty line; some were in gangs, some spoke no English, some would never graduate. But she advocated the use of school money to buy fifty Thanksgiving turkeys, an action that surpassed and ignored the futility of painful poorness, of despair. One by one, home by home, we drove in our car to the houses of those who privately requested this assistance. We delivered turkeys, an act of the purest faith.

In one house, three little girls sat on the front porch in the cold as their parents screamed and fought inside, and we left the turkey with the girls. We couldn't go inside the door of one other house because at least twenty residents were crowded in one of the apartment's two rooms. We pulled up to one house and saw two cars parked facing each other in front. Young men sat inside each, hollow-eyed as they stared down their rival gang. We pulled away quickly, the pile of turkeys tumbling over in the trunk.

Some houses were irrepressibly cheerful. "Thank y'all so much, it's a great thing you're doing, take care." Some houses were angry: sarcastic thanks, glares, doors slammed. Which response was more upsetting?

One house was not a house. We rode down Aurora Avenue, a long hopeless street crowded with lit-up pink fluorescent signs, yellow liquor stores, blue prostitutes, and those who were lost among them. Following a map, my mother turned.

"This is it," she said, very softly. She said it as softly as I questioned myself during sacrament all of those years ago. She said it so softly, so softly, because we had arrived at the last home: a crumbling motel, built for one-night stands. She opened her car door, and shook her head when I attempted to do the same. When she came back ten full minutes later, relieved of the turkey, she looked as though she had died. "It's a mother and her son," she said steadily. "They're homeless. He takes the bus to school. He's deaf." Her steadiness collapsed, and she burst into tears on the steering wheel.

All of us live by faith. We live by pure, perplexing faith.

Why start? The questions have begun now, pounding gently into my skull and my chest whenever there is a moment to really look at these things I see. These are the questions of my seven-

year-old self, bending and unanswerable questions asked over and over and over, irritatingly so: why did Jesus hurt so badly? Why are people homeless? Why do very poor young men spend their money on guns, and wage war? Why are some of my friends' parents divorced? Why do so many people hurt but continue to believe? Why don't people understand? Why stop? Why start? I think these things to myself as Jeff Buckley sings sweetly into the side of my head, and I gaze out the window into the growing dusk.

But then I turn fifteen, and my private spaces are opened. I begin to see the changing lives around me. I heard first through seventh grade gossip (Jell-O shots, oral sex, weed smoked in the bushes). I was mainly incredulous, and my friends agreed; we shared mutual condescension, a mutual sense of questioning. But things began to move like planets: gently and hugely expanding, exploding. People began to drink, in a circle that became closer and closer and around me. People began to leave their houses, run from their parents, lie to their brothers and their sisters. I spent more weekends alone as parties began to form whose exclusive purpose was intoxication. I became the friend that people loved to confess to, whose reactions and innocence were enjoyable, flammable. I pretended to be cool; I pretended not to have questions. I looked out windows.

But on that bleak February night, the questions burst out of me, as loud as stars, as clear as vodka. My best friend Alana was beautiful, flaky, and impulsive. We were innocent. We were a kind of faith.

One night when I was fifteen, she called me at home in her giggly way and told me she had a crazy story. I sat down, hard. I knew what was coming. I barely listened as she gave me a stream of excited proud narrative (vodka and Sprite, vomit, loss, first time, hands in pants, boys seeking), offering only my coolness. Then I hung up and felt the questions begin to come up, acidic like her vomit, questions that were sharp in my stomach, the faith pulling me in another painful direction, the churning of parallel knowledge. I knew now that faith asked questions, and that I needed to ask questions, and to question myself. Eliza? I asked.

"Eliza?" Alana asked after a silence, for confirmation, for coolness. But she was already spinning away from me like a planet, choosing to leave me behind in my leather chair. And I began to feel that loss again, loss that I was forced to accept, loss as

terrible as a movie of Jesus that I could not stop.

This is an essay about faith. And the essence of faith is dichotomy: unshakable knowledge in the face of bloody questions, pain tempered with deep sweetness, a presence of the divine mixed with never-ending suffering. Here I am, on my leather chair on this wintery Friday night. The sun goes down, the sun comes up. I wax and wane like the moon. I cringe. I laugh.

And as I grow older, as my private spaces become deeper, the paradox will only widen. The imbalance will grow, the sense of division will strengthen. In brief: the questions will get louder.

But the answers will deafen them.

(We are in the forest. The night is dark blue and chilly, the trees sharpen around a circle of benches. Girls go up to a microphone to bear

their testimonies, to cry, to sing, and I am not impressed. There are two huge fires, orange flames leaping on either side of the girl with the shaking microphone. Suddenly time stops. I look and the fire blazes against the bleeding blue sky and the stars are as cloudy as meat and blood and heaven opens slightly and the flames climb and sing for me and time pulses for me, and I hear the voice of God: I know, I know, I know, I know, I know, I know, I know I know I know I know I know I know why, I know why against everything, with everything, I know, I know I know I know forever and ever.)

The answers are deafening, and I am shouting with sureness and laughter through the high winter window.

I am asking and answering the questions loudly in my leather chair. ■

Interview with Eliza Campbell

BY GIDEON BURTON



What is the relationship between your faith and your writing?

I think writing and faith are deeply connected to each other—they're both concerned with expression of the divine in the self. When we write, we catalogue and search for what we believe about ourselves. My experiences with faith and writing have made me believe that everyone should have the opportunity and desire to write.

Why are you expressing yourself in both a personal and public way through this genre?

LDS writers are kind of singular in this way. As Mormons, we bear our testimonies to each other, we are encouraged to keep journals, we are encouraged to share sacred texts with each other and our children. The LDS doctrine almost demands that we all be writers. As an LDS writer, I've come to see how personal expression is both public and private. It's kind of like giving a prayer aloud—in sharing my deepest personal reflections in a public way, I'm coming closer to God and closer to those around me.

It's been said that literature is "equipment for living." How well does this work for you? What metaphor would you apply to refer to writing?

Literature in all its forms—meaning not just the written word, but music, poetry, different kinds of art, and almost any other form of expression—seems to be essential for humans who are working to understand each other, and yes, who are living. In my life, literature has come to hold significance from a social justice perspective: by promoting the ability for everyone to create literature, we are promoting the ability for others to have more productive and peaceful lives. Literature is at once absolutely personal and absolutely political.

What was your writing process like? Do you keep a diary or journal? Is this essay stemming from journal entries, for example?

I actually wrote "Faith" about a year ago, as my first Honors University Writing assignment, a personal narrative. I found, as I think a lot of people do, that the feelings and experiences I had after leaving home and coming to college were overwhelming, and I wasn't able to express them in a journal. They kind of spilled out through this essay. I sat down one day feeling very polarized by two worlds—two worlds that I think I write about in the essay itself. For me, writing usually comes at moments like these—moments of separation, when binaries are failing to justify my actions and I need some way to give a voice to the gray area in my life. ■

Essay on “Faith”

BY GIDEON BURTON

I don't know and have never met Eliza Campbell. She exists for me only as a persona, a voice scattered over a few hundred words. Her entire existence—to me—is just ten minutes of vicarious experience that I spend with someone of indefinite age and no fixed background except our common faith. And yet she is someone I would like to know or have known, or perhaps she is a person that, in some regard, I am.

This is the power of the personal essay, a genre that some LDS critics have considered to be singularly consonant with Latter-day Saint experience. Located along that continuum of personal expression and belief that includes the privacy of the diary and the public confession of testimony bearing, the personal essay conveys in simplicity Paul's admonition to “prove all things” and Peter's to “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.”

And while Eliza's hope is evidently in Christ, she gives us not a Sunday School generalization;

she offers the lived experience of doubt and tears. We are thrust into the upsetting chaos of adolescent life when our early certainties give way to experience that is both thrilling and disappointing. Hers is a reflection both bright and dark, held steady by the beam of that personal voice that summons us to sympathy without sentimentality.

This is nowhere more evident than in the climax of her essay, where she invokes anything but a pastoral image or a cheesy religious cliché. As she achieves what normal Mormon folks would call “her testimony,” this is expressed “cloudy as meat and blood”—harking back to the image of a bloodied Christ that she mentions earlier, a Jesus not so antiseptic as a sweet sermon on redemption. No, Eliza's witness is one of fire and smoke: sacramental, primal, sudden.

Faith is evanescent, but within Campbell's essay, it takes a body—a bruised and bloody form, as adequate for spiritual reality as it is for literary authenticity. Listen to her voice. It rings true. ■

"Adam and Eve"

First Place

BY DAVEY MORRISON DILLARD

(The stage is empty—bathed in the yellow-blue warmth of sunrise—except for a single short tree stump Center Stage. As the lights come up, EVE enters, holding a bright red apple, and sits.)

A few moments later, ADAM enters from Stage Right, scratching his rib. He looks at EVE and then Doesn't Look At EVE. He saunters across the stage, checking every few seconds to see if she's noticed him yet—she hasn't—and then wanders over behind her tree stump.)

ADAM: Oh, hey! I didn't know you were here. I hope I'm not interrupting or anything.

EVE: You are.

ADAM: Oh.

(Silence. He fidgets.)

So. . . . How you doing?

EVE: Considering we just got kicked out of Paradise? Not bad. Been better. It was almost worth it. The apple's good.

ADAM: You bring any more of those?

EVE: Yep.

(He waits for her to offer him one. She doesn't.)

ADAM: Mind if I have a seat?

EVE: Go ahead.

(ADAM sits on the ground and looks around, trying to find something to say next.)

ADAM: Yeah, so about that whole be fruitful and multiply thing . . .

EVE: Adam.

ADAM: Hey, I'm just saying.

EVE: We fell from innocence a half hour ago.

ADAM: Okay, I was just trying to make

conversation. Forget it.

(Silence.)

ADAM: You want to talk?

EVE: No, I don't want to talk.

ADAM: You okay?

EVE: I'm fine.

ADAM: You don't sound fine.

EVE: Then why did you ask me if I was fine? If you're not going to believe what I tell you then why are you asking?

ADAM: I don't know, I'm sorry.

EVE: I'm just upset.

ADAM: Yeah.

(He reaches over and holds her hand. She looks at it, baffled.)

EVE: What are you doing?

ADAM: I'm holding your hand.

EVE: Why?

ADAM: I don't know. It seemed like a good thing to do.

EVE: It's weird. Stop it.

ADAM: Okay.

(He does. Silence.)

EVE: How would you like it if I held your kneecap or something? Would that make you feel better?

(He thinks about it.)

ADAM: It might.

(She doesn't look at him. Another silence.)

ADAM: What's wrong?

EVE: Nothing's wrong.

ADAM: Something's wrong. What is it?

EVE: I told you, I'm just upset. I don't know why.

Sometimes this happens to me. I don't really get it.

ADAM: You get upset and you don't know why?

EVE: Yeah.

ADAM: That's messed up.

EVE: Thanks.

ADAM: No, I mean, you have to know why, you're just not telling me.

EVE: I told you. I don't know why.

ADAM: That doesn't make sense.

EVE: Sue me!

ADAM: Is it the whole apple thing?

EVE: I don't know, all right? Maybe. Probably. I don't know.

ADAM: Maybe it comes with mortality. Emotional instability, I mean.

EVE: I just need some alone time right now. Okay?

ADAM: Okay.

(He gets up and starts leaving, then stops.)

Is there anything I can do?

EVE: Just leave me alone for one minute!

ADAM: Okay.

(ADAM exits.)

EVE sits down on the ground. In spite of her best attempts to stifle it, a single, ugly sob escapes.

She holds the rest of her tears back, sniffs, clears her throat, wipes the moisture from her eyes, and pauses to collect herself.

ADAM enters.)

ADAM: Hey.

EVE: Go away.

ADAM: You know, I don't feel good about leaving you alone like this.

EVE: Adam. You don't know anything about women.

(ADAM thinks about that.)

ADAM: You're right.

(He doesn't move.)

EVE: Are you going to go?

ADAM: I don't know. Should I?

EVE: I don't know.

ADAM: *(nervously)* I like you a lot, Eve. You know that?

EVE: Yeah.

ADAM: I don't know if that helps any.

EVE: Yeah. Me neither.

(ADAM goes to hold her hand, then stops himself. She doesn't notice.)

EVE: I mean, I like you a lot too, but . . .

ADAM: But what?

EVE: But . . . I don't know.



ADAM: I'm not your type?

EVE: No, that's not it. I don't know.

ADAM: What's wrong?

EVE: I just. . . If I wasn't the only woman on Earth, would you still want me?

(He thinks.)

ADAM: That's a good question.

EVE: *(standing up)* I'm going.

ADAM: I mean, yes.

EVE: You're awful, you know that?

ADAM: Really, I would!

EVE: Goodbye!

ADAM: I would! I just had to think about it for a second.

EVE: Yeah you did.

ADAM: Yeah!

EVE: Yeah.

ADAM: Hey. Out of the billions and billions of other women who might have been here, you're not even allowing me a second to even consider any one of them?

EVE: Nope.

ADAM: Come on, Eve.

EVE: This isn't going to work. Sorry, God, but this isn't going to work.

ADAM: You're beautiful.

EVE: Ha!

ADAM: And wonderful.

EVE: Shut up.
 ADAM: Really. You are.
 EVE: Shut up!
(She exits.)
 ADAM: Fine. Okay!
(Pause.)
 You know, I'm glad you had the apple. Maybe I shouldn't be. Maybe I'm not supposed to be. But I am. You really are beautiful. I never really saw how beautiful you are till . . . after.
(EVE re-enters. She stands there, looking at ADAM sitting on the other side of the stage.)
 EVE: I don't know if you're just making all that up or if you really mean it. I want to think you really meant it.
 ADAM: I did. I do.
(Silence.)
 EVE: Who does that? "Don't eat from the tree." "Go forth and be fruitful." Who does that?
 ADAM: Yeah, I don't get it either.
 EVE: It doesn't make sense at all. At all. You've got more sense than that.
 ADAM: Thanks.
 EVE: I didn't mean—okay, I've got more sense than that. Better?
 ADAM: Better.
 EVE: I just feel guilty...I don't know.
 ADAM: Sex?



EVE: Yeah.
 ADAM: Yeah.
 EVE: . . . yeah.
(A pause; then they both start talking at the same time.)
 ADAM: I was wondering—
 EVE: What would you—
(They stop.)
 EVE: You go first.
 ADAM: No you.
 EVE: Talk.
(ADAM struggles for a moment to work up the nerve to speak again.)
 ADAM: Do you think I'm . . . attractive?
 EVE: I guess so.
 ADAM: Ouch.
 EVE: I mean, yeah. Yes. I do.
 ADAM: Okay.
 EVE: *(putting her hand on his knee)* Really, I do.
 ADAM: I believe you.
 EVE: Okay, good.
(A moment. EVE notices their position and moves away.)
 EVE: It just feels so . . . base, you know? I mean, you are the only guy on Earth. It makes me feel, I don't know—cheap maybe? Does that make sense?
 ADAM: Yeah. . . .
(He thinks about it.)
 No, not really.
 EVE: I mean, it's so animalistic. I'm a girl and you're a guy and we're stuck here together, so we make babies.
 ADAM: Right.
 EVE: No romance. Purely physiological. Isn't that gross? Ew. That's gross. We're gross.
 ADAM: Well, when you put it that way. . . .
 EVE: We're gross.
 ADAM: Okay, we're gross. *(Pause.)* But I'd like to.
 EVE: I know.
 ADAM: You would too?
 EVE: I didn't say that. I just said I know.
(Beat.)
 It's weird. This whole wanting thing. I can't decide how I feel about it.
 ADAM: So you would?
 EVE: Do what?
 ADAM: Want to . . . you know, be the mother of all nations. That.
 EVE: I didn't say that. Stop putting words in my mouth.

ADAM: I'm not trying to put words in your mouth, I was just . . . curious. *(Beat.)* God told us to. *(Silence.)*

EVE: You want a pet?

ADAM: *(taken aback)* What?

EVE: Yeah. You know, a pet. A little animal. We could keep it around. Be nice to it. Play fetch.

ADAM: Oh. Why?

EVE: Just because.

ADAM: Okaay. . . .

EVE: We don't have to, I was just asking.

ADAM: Like, what kind of a pet—animal?

EVE: I don't know.

ADAM: The big guys are off-limits you know.

EVE: Right.

ADAM: Right. You saw that. We have our apples, a couple seconds later a lion is tearing off a gazelle's leg. I don't know about you, but I'm pretty fond of my legs.

EVE: *(musing)* Isn't that a funny word?

ADAM: What? Leg?

EVE: Well, that too.

ADAM: Which word?

EVE: Apple.

ADAM: Funny? I don't see how it's funny. How is "apple" funny?

EVE: I don't know. Just listen to it. "Apple." Apple apple apple apple.

ADAM: *(getting annoyed)* Hey.

EVE: Apple.

ADAM: It's a perfectly decent word.

EVE: Apple!

ADAM: Why is it all my words are stupid?

EVE: I didn't say it was stupid, I just said it was funny.

ADAM: Okay, sure, "apple" is funny.

EVE: You don't have to agree with me.

ADAM: Okay.

EVE: Stop it.

ADAM: Stop what?

EVE: Have you just been agreeing with everything I've been saying?

ADAM: I don't know. Maybe.

EVE: Stop it!

ADAM: Maybe we just agree on a lot of things.

EVE: No.

ADAM: Maybe.

EVE: You're just agreeing with everything I say and it's ridiculous.

ADAM: All right, I'll stop it. *(Beat.)*

EVE: I'm sorry.

ADAM: Why?

EVE: Because I'm crazy.

ADAM: I don't think so.

EVE: I am.

ADAM: I don't think so.

EVE: You're just trying to be nice.

ADAM: Well if I can't agree with you and I can't be nice, what am I supposed to say? *(EVE thinks about this, then laughs.)*

ADAM: What?

EVE: That's funny.

ADAM: Apple!

(She laughs again.)

ADAM: Apple apple apple.

EVE: *(laughing)* Stop it!

ADAM: Apple!

EVE: I can't breathe!

ADAM: Aaaaappppppllllle!

(EVE laughs till she cries. She finally calms down, and then she takes a look at ADAM's face and starts laughing again. He waits for it to end and it finally does. EVE takes a deep breath.)

EVE: Hey.

ADAM: What?

EVE: You know when you held my hand a little while ago?

ADAM: Yeah.

EVE: That was weird.

ADAM: Yeah. I know.

EVE: But I kinda liked it. *(ADAM looks at her. He holds her hand.)*

EVE: I wish God was here.

ADAM: You miss Him?

EVE: Yeah.

ADAM: Me too.

EVE: Well, a little. I don't know. I feel like I should. Maybe it's just so recent it hasn't really sunk in yet, you know?

ADAM: Yeah.

EVE: It doesn't feel like He's really. . . . It feels like He's still around.

ADAM: It does. *(They sit together. She leans her head against his shoulder.)*

EVE: Are you scared?

ADAM: A little.

EVE: Me too. *(They think about this.)*

ADAM: That's okay. *(And it is. Lights down.)* ■

Interview with Davey Morrison Dillard

BY BOYD PETERSEN



What was the inspiration for “Adam and Eve”?

It’s hard to say, really. I’d recently been re-reading Genesis at the time—for me one of the most beautiful books of scripture—and I was at home watching Darren Aronofsky’s film *The Fountain* for the first time one afternoon, when suddenly the thought popped into my head, “What would it have been like for Adam dating the only woman on earth?” I put the movie on pause, went upstairs, sat down at the computer, and started typing.

After I read the play, I found some startling correspondences between Adam and Eve and my girlfriend (now my wife) and me, but she never saw them, and I honestly can’t remember what most of them were anymore. But I guess art imitates life imitates art, etc.

What was the writing process like? How many revisions did you go through?

I hammered out a first draft in a couple hours that afternoon, and then later that day I went back, read it over, moved a few things around, added a little, probably changed a couple lines, and that was my second draft.

I took that to a playwriting workshop hosted by New Play Project a day or two later. They had a few suggestions, and I changed a couple more lines, but for the most part, it was written just a couple of hours after I had the idea. I wish it would happen like that every time.

Where has “Adam and Eve” been performed?

So far it’s had one production at New Play Project (and I have to give kudos to the brilliant director and actors we had) and one at Payson High School, which I wasn’t able to see.

Who was your intended audience for the piece? Do you see it being performed elsewhere?

The play was written with New Play Project in mind—written for an audience interested in LDS theatre told from an LDS perspective. The play is definitely informed by a Mormon sensibility—the theological idea of the Fall as inherently necessary and even positive is a very Mormon idea, and it’s central to the play. That said, I like to think the piece would be entertaining to members of other faiths as well as those who don’t believe in God at all. The play is really about any couple—about the leap of faith required just to be with someone else. In the eternal scheme of things, we’re all Adams and Eves, facing a scary world with a companion we sometimes barely seem to know, and trying to make our own paradise with help from a Higher Power. Whether you call that power “God” or something else, I think, is much less important.

Have you thought about expanding the play or of adapting other scriptural narratives?

I’ve played around with the idea of a full-length play involving a number of different stories



from the Old Testament—Genesis in particular—inspired by the medieval “cycle plays.” In these kinds of plays, each cycle was made up of a

number of short plays based on some of the most significant biblical stories; the characters would speak in contemporary language and would use the stories to deal with contemporary issues. This was how whole generations learned the stories of the Bible, because if they didn’t know Latin, they couldn’t hear them any other way. This second-hand, entertainment-based form of presentation was more than a little problematic (who knew Cain had a funny, bumbling servant?), but there’s also something really beautiful about telling stories this way—they’re not just things that happened once. They happened then, they happen now, they’ll happen again, and they’ll always be happening, because truth is eternal. Sometimes our supposed reverence for our stories can remove us from what’s really important about them—that they still have the power to be as real and as immediate now as when they happened. My goal is to allow audiences to connect with the emotional and spiritual immediacy while finding new things to consider in these stories. ■

Essay on “Adam and Eve” and “Coring the Apple”

BY BOYD PETERSEN

Adam and Eve remained in the Garden for many years, undisturbed by commentator, critic, rabbi, or priest. The narrative, for some reason, never really caught on with its original tenth-century BCE audience. From the Second Temple period on (538 BCE–135 CE), however, the narrative became central to literature and art in Western culture. It became a vessel that contained and transmitted each community’s hopes, fears, beliefs, and values; it supported their customs and rituals and justified their traditions and norms. Retellings appear in early pseudepigraphical and apocryphal works and in commentary by Jewish rabbis and philosophers. Many of these early works attempted to expand on the original, filling in gaps and answering questions left unanswered by the original narrative—gaps and questions about the conditions of the Garden, the nature of the sin, how Adam and Eve reacted to the world they were expelled to, their first experience with illness, and even Eve’s point of view.

The Adam and Eve narrative is, of course, central to the economy of the Atonement for Christians: the first Adam brought death; Christ, the second Adam, brought life through His sacrificial death. Assuming such a central place in Christian thought, it is no wonder it became ubiquitous in Western literature. The narrative was retold as a literary work most famously by Milton but has been a common reference point in literary works from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* to C.S. Lewis’s *Perelandra* and



Bernard Malamud’s *God’s Grace*. Adam and Eve make appearances in popular culture in films like *The Truman Show*, *Pleasantville*, and *Wall-E*; in the funny pages, and in advertising messages. They even show up in an episode of *The Simpsons*.

Since the formative years of Christianity, two opposing interpretations of the Adam and Eve narrative have competed for dominance in Western culture. In the early days of Christianity, two opposing groups fought to become the normative

version of the religion: the orthodox and the Gnostics. As Elaine Pagels, a prominent religious scholar, has stated, it is not much of an oversimplification to sum up the entire controversy between the two groups “as a battle over the disputed territory of the first three books of Genesis.”¹ The orthodox viewed the text literally and believed Eve’s choice to take the fruit was a sin that left the entire human race fallen and overcome with sin, while the Gnostics viewed the text allegorically and saw her choice as a good thing—a preference for knowledge over innocence. Despite the fact that the Gnostics lost the battle, gnostic ways of viewing the narrative resurface again and again, most famously during the Romantic period.

Today the differences between other Christians and Latter-day Saints similarly focus on the different interpretations each gives to the Adam and Eve narrative. The Mormon position, while maintaining a literal reading, is radically gnostic in its orientation. We see the Fall as fortunate, knowledge as a boon, and Adam and Eve as heroes. Furthermore, many of the major theological differences between Latter-day Saints and other Christians—our beliefs in the corporeality of God, the unique individual identities of the Trinity, the repudiation of original sin, the nature of the Fall, and the role of Christ—center on our unique reading of the Adam and Eve narrative.

Both Davey Morrison Dillard’s play “Adam and Eve” and Sarah Page’s poem “Coring the Apple” illustrate this unique LDS reading of the first chapters of Genesis, while simultaneously, whether consciously or unconsciously, reflecting the larger literature on Adam and Eve. Both demonstrate uniquely LDS sensitivities, but both fall into a long tradition within Western culture of reworking the original narrative. Morrison’s play recalls a long tradition of “gap-filling”—of trying to imagine the original hopes, fears, words, and deeds of our primeval parents. Morrison’s gift is being able to recognize the humor implicit in the situation—how would it be to date the only other person on earth? How would it be to be told, in the company of that date, to be “fruitful and multiply”? How does one show affection for another person, having never seen any example? (Holding hands? Who would have thought of that?) Morrison has a keen eye for recognizing the potential awkward moments of this first courtship. The play is strongly reminiscent of Mark Twain’s *Diaries of Adam & Eve*. Like Twain, Morrison sees potential for great humor in

the gaps left unfilled by the original text. But Morrison’s text is uniquely Mormon. He recognizes the Fall as involving a choice between two contradictory commandments and notes that it brought new knowledge to our first parents: a sense of guilt and shame at having been disobedient, but also a new understanding of beauty. “I never really saw how beautiful you are till . . . after.” Most importantly, Morrison recognizes—with restrained understatement—the fears that must have accompanied being truly alone in a dreary world and highlights the courage of that first couple: “Are you scared?” “A little.” “Me too.” “That’s okay.” Readers know what that first couple could not: it will be okay. But it won’t be easy and it certainly won’t be painless.

Sarah Page’s “Coring the Apple” is strongly reminiscent, and she acknowledges the influence of Robert Frost’s sonnet “Never Again Would Bird’s Song Be the Same.” Frost’s poem celebrates Eve as the creator of the soft eloquence of sound, coequal in her work to Adam’s task of naming (creating words), the two abilities necessary, ultimately, for poetic production. But Page is not simply imitating Frost. While Frost honors Eve’s (in fact all women’s) gift of beauty to the world, Page celebrates Eve as a hero, as the shaper of divine destiny.

Page also plays with scripture in ways that are much older than Frost. Her experiment with finding poetry by borrowing from two separate verses of scripture that appear to be unrelated recalls the ancient Jewish rabbinical commentary (or *midrash*) on the Bible. The rabbis approached the biblical text in much the same way Page approaches it: they assumed that every biblical verse has something to teach us, that all verses are interrelated, and that these verses have limitless potential for meaning. The *midrash* exhibited the same kind of playfulness with language and bold new readings that Page demonstrates in her poem. However, like Morrison’s play, Page’s poem is uniquely Mormon. She sees Eve as a courageous woman, making a conscious choice, aware of the enormous stakes of that choice—but also seeing the limitless potential of future generations. It is common among Latter-day Saints to believe that, as he was suffering in Gethsemane and on the Cross, Jesus knew each of us personally and took upon himself each of our individual sins. But it is a unique insight to think that Eve was also aware of each of our lives and all of our potential when she took that fateful bite. Page recognizes that, for Latter-day Saints, Christ is

not so much the Second Adam as he is the Second Eve. For it is Eve who we celebrate for making that glorious decision to become mortal and wise, and it is Christ who transforms us from mortal to immortal, from wise to saved.

Throughout the history of retelling the Adam and Eve narrative, Eve has been portrayed in both a positive and negative light. In one rabbinic *midrash*, it speculated that women need perfume because Eve was made from a rib and, since bones putrefy, women must cover the stench. Contrasting that notion is an early apocryphal text that portrays Adam as frightened to the point of death by his first experience with darkness. Adam dreads the darkness not so much because he cannot see, but because he cannot see Eve. “For, so long as we were in the garden, we neither saw nor even knew what darkness is. I was not hidden from Eve,

neither was she hidden from me. . . .”² Likewise, in Twain’s *Diaries of Adam & Eve*, Adam has the last word as he laments over the death of Eve: “Where-soever she was, there was Eden.” The long tradition of literary gap-filling continues. What both Morrison and Page accomplish in their works is, not only to portray the fears, hopes, humor, and tragedy of Adam and Eve, but to recognize—in a uniquely Mormon way—the first couple as bravely ushering in a new world of endless possibility. ■

ENDNOTES

1. Elaine Pagels, “Adam and Eve and the Serpent in Genesis 1–3,” in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. Karen L. King (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 413.
2. “The Conflict of Adam & Eve with Satan” in *The Forgotten Books of Eden*, ed. Rutherford H. Platt, Jr. (New York: Bell, 1981, reprint of the 1927 ed.), 11.

"Tales of Teancum Singh Rosenberg"

Epilogue

BY JAMES GOLDBERG

1

They say he wanted to be a weaver, like Kabir, but developed an inexplicable allergy to thread. No matter, he said, that part was all metaphor anyway: what he really wanted to weave together were the fragments of stories that had been kept in corners and boxes, fragments that hung in the air or got stuck between the teeth at dinner. And so he wove, sometimes by day and especially by night, and produced great rugs and tapestries, both for living people and as tributes to the Singularity of God.

It was only when he hung them outside that he realized they were all written in a language no one spoke. He was devastated.

One day he complained to God, said "Why did you make my mind a loom—was it only for this?"

Some say God began to answer him slowly, and the words filled the rest of his years. Others say God didn't answer at all for a long time, until quite suddenly at the end.

* * *

But how shall I begin to tell you the stories he lived? How can I express what they mean to us? As Herschel of Ostropol to the Ashkenazim, as Nasreddin Hodja to the Turks, so is Teancum Singh Rosenberg to my people. He is less wise, perhaps, and certainly less witty, but he is ours.

He's a fool, he's a folktale, he's a broken half of a hero. He may or may not have even ever existed, but his tales are still our language, and for someone's sake, our language ought to be spoken, ought to be stored in books and kept for a day when somewhere it's desperately needed.

* * *

Accounts of his childhood are most likely retroactive creations, projected back after people began to tell stories about him out of a need (like mine) for some sort of beginning. Because of this, they are improbable and often contradictory.

In this sense, they are entirely typical of childhood sketches.

One account has it that his home was an idyllic paradise—until he was born. The first thing the infant Rosenberg did was to shake his fist at the sky itself, and the next thing the sky did was to cover itself in grey so as not to have to witness his insolence.

The sky remained grey for nearly two years, until the child began to speak and cursed it; the sky responded by pouring down unceasing rain to drown out Rosenberg's words.

When, after some time, the ground realized that the rain and drudgery had been sent on the child's account, it begged the sky to take them back. The sky consented, leaving Teancum's father's farm to wither and dry until it blew away.

Perhaps there is some truth to the story, and that is why our only homeland is the wind.

* * *

In another version, Teancum's parents quarreled bitterly even before his birth. His father alternated between periods of indignation, righteous or otherwise, and deep depressions. His mother, on the other hand, was quick to apologize for her own temper—but just as quick to remember during the course of her apologies what had made her so angry in the first place and burst into a heat of rage again.

If his parents were loving and good during the day, they tore the house in half fighting at night. If

they were loving and kind at night, they tore the house into hundredths during the day.

If Teancum himself was often torn in halves or hundredths in the course of these fights, that may serve to explain something about his later nature.

Perhaps it because of the way he was torn that we still tell fragments of stories about him.

* * *

The clues Teancum Singh Rosenberg gives us about his own childhood are as follows:

When one host asked why he tended to eat so quickly and how he had become so generally itinerant, wandering forever from place to place, Teancum Singh replied: "As a child, I had to fight with dogs for my scraps. I've kept the scraps, so somewhere inside of me the dogs remain also."

A mother of one child and a father of another were talking in a courtyard once—mourning the damage their poor skills as parents would no doubt do to their children's minds and souls. Overhearing them, Rosenberg remarked: "Half-broken children grow up wanting to heal the world. Why raise a child whole and content? All it will want to do is amuse itself and eat."

Once, a conspiracy against his life forced Teancum Singh into hiding. He avoided harm, he told a friend, by playing games with a group of four-year-olds—though three times their size, he was otherwise too much like them to be detected.

* * *

So much for the enigma of his beginnings. Accounts agree that as he aged, Teancum Singh Rosenberg was given two gifts from God: the loom of his mind, and the aching desire to fill it with the stories of the past, woven into an aid and protection for the present. Searching for that help, we search through his stories. And yet it is *his* desperate search for stories that fills the oldest stories about him.

* * *

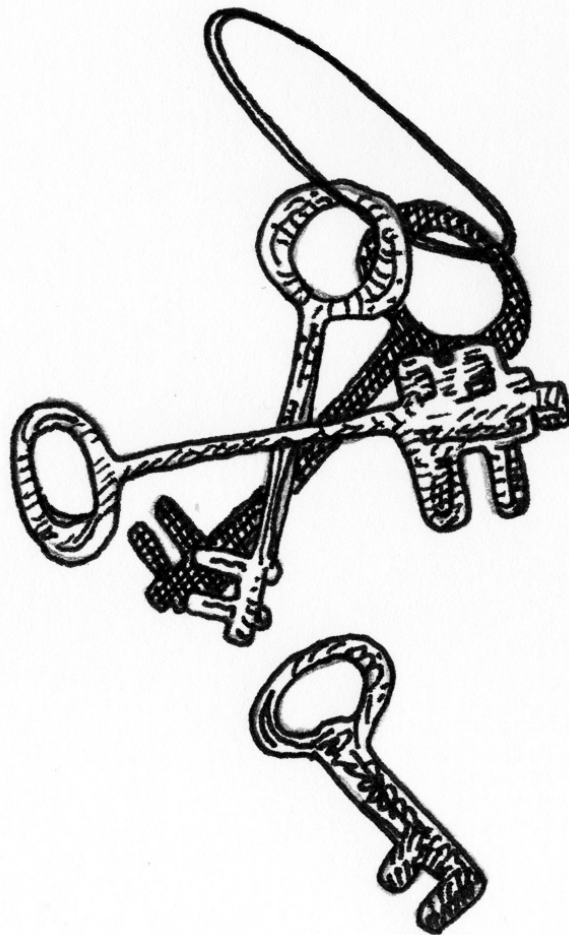
They say he would have given his thumb to learn the story of Eklavya. He would have let a worm bore through his leg without crying out to learn of Karnā's fate. He would have gone by night, risking the wrath of the Emperor, to take the head

of Tegh Bahadur if that meant he could hear one more tale of Gobind Singh.

He would have traded his home and wealth, if necessary, for the record of Nephi. Gone mute through life just to know what happened to Korihor. Hidden in a cavity of a rock for Ether's story's sake.

If the Messiah himself had come, Teancum Singh might have asked him to wait just a little longer while Teancum finished memorizing the legends of the Zugot and the Tannaim. How could you receive His Coming without some stories that tell you He will Come?

"Sometimes a story is a key, and the lock and the treasure chest are missing," he said. "All the more reason to gather the keys, and quickly!"



* * *

For three years, Teancum Singh Rosenberg refused to cut his hair.

“The son of two lions should know how it feels to look like one” he said.

* * *

The Huma is a bird that always flies, but almost never lands, a bird which one cannot catch even in dreams. They say, though, that whoever can touch even the shadow the flying Huma casts wrests the rule of a kingdom from destiny’s hands.

They also say that Teancum Singh was listening to his grandmother tell a story when the Huma flew by. Some say the Huma even circled him, but he stayed still and listened, even when the shadow came within the reach of his hands.

Why not chase the Huma? Why not take the time even to reach out his arm? He could have used the power, and any accompanying protection. We could have used it—even the memory of someone else’s success can inspire. But—no. His hand stayed still, the shadow passed.

“Why chase after a kingdom,” he said, “when in every old woman’s shadow are worlds without end?”

* * *

“The scraps that I fought for,” he once said “were the traditions of my ancestors.

“And oh, how the dogs fought to take them from me! How hard they tried to tear them to pieces!”



* * *

Once, Teancum studied the names of his ancestors with such intensity that the prophet Elijah was forced to come personally on his chariot of fire to ask him to stop: Rosenberg had drawn so much of Elijah’s spirit to himself that there was little left for the rest of the world. Not wanting to disobey a prophet, Teancum Singh obeyed, but, being unwilling to surrender the *intensity* of his study, channeled the energy into chasing after Elijah’s chariot instead, determined to follow him back to heaven itself.

Teancum followed the chariot one mile, and then twain, at which point it crossed a river that was the gateway into heaven. But the river was swift as well as deep and wide.

Teancum cried out, “Elijah, wait! How do I get to the other side?”

Over the water came Elijah’s laughter back. “You *are* on the other side” was all he said.

* * *

“We never know who we are,” said Teancum, “because we never understand God.

“And yet He is always wrapped in our history, always hiding underneath our skin.”

* * *

Another time, Teancum announced that he would visit the Temple in Jerusalem. When others heard of his plan, they scoffed—said, “What wealth is in the House of Rosenberg that he could journey over an ocean?” Said, “He would have to walk, and you can’t walk on water with such heavy, callused feet.”

Rosenberg only smiled. Later, he took off his shoes, covered his head, and whispered to Baruch Moroni Brar, “The Wailing Wall must serve as both the Western and the Eastern bounds now. We all stand in the Temple, but how rarely do we recognize its Holy Ground!”

* * *

Most often, he freely admitted himself to be blind to it. “I was born less to see,” he said, “than to remember that there was once a story in which someone saw.

“And, if Drona doesn’t keep me from it, to share the story of that old story’s half-forgotten existence.”

* * *

Every quest requires obstacles, and Drona was Teancum Singh’s greatest. Or perhaps it was the other way around: Drona’s was the quest, and Teancum Singh was a pebble in the path, a would-be obstacle who went almost entirely without notice.

They met only once, though they shared the small-seeming space of a single world. It is, therefore, impossible to understand Teancum Singh Rosenberg without knowing something about Drona. One of the things we most desperately want from Teancum is for him to prove Newton’s laws by being Drona’s reactive opposite, though we understand that our Teancum was never Drona’s equal. How could anyone compare with the latter’s influence? Some say the spirit of Drona still fills the earth.

If Teancum is a spark in the darkness, Drona is the moonless night. And why should the night notice just one spark? If Teancum is a freshwater fish, Drona is the ocean, and there is always room in the ocean for one more fish’s corpse.

If Drona is a vast warship, though, Teancum is a leak, and in that, at least, we take hope.

* * *

They were both teachers. Teancum was a teacher with few or no pupils; Drona’s students were drawn from every land. Teancum’s lessons were like a hole in the pocket; Drona’s could line the pockets with gold—he had always been known as a master of craft. Almost every craft.

“There are few skills he hasn’t mastered,” said Rosenberg on a particularly bitter occasion, “Two of those, unfortunately, are mercy and truth.”

Few cared to listen to Rosenberg for long unless all other alternatives had been exhausted. The perceptive and the ambitious, the leaders of today and the leaders of tomorrow, flocked to Drona and hoped to touch his feet.

“Nothing makes me feel so sick,” Teancum said, “as remembering that Drona will rule this world for longer than you or I can hope to live.”

Would Drona have recognized himself in the Weaver’s accusation? He was, after all, never acknowledged as a leader in the world, but rather as

the servant of the leaders. And he would have felt bound, even in the absence of leaders, to his sense of duty to a certain view of the world.

“Even Drona lives under Drona’s thumb” Teancum is known to have complained. “Even Drona is darkened by Drona’s shadow.”

* * *

What did Drona know best? The martial disciplines, with their pursuit of pure excellence. The discipline of duty as an ethic, duty that pre-empted further exploration of right and wrong. What did Drona know? How to serve Kauravas and to serve Pandavas as if they were Kauravas; to instill in the Pandavas through his devotion an arrogance that made them act like Kauravas. “If good and evil were cousins,” said Teancum Singh, “Drona will try to make them brothers.

“If they are brothers, he would try to convince us that they are one and the same.”

Would Drona have assigned himself such intent, any intent? His role was not to propagate any new view, but to perpetuate an existing order. Drona is a symbol of order—an order in which we do not and cannot fit.

* * *

“In these days of Drona, our choice is to starve or else be devoured. In the days of Drona, the dogs are no different than princes and kings” Teancum said. When pressed for evidence of these claims, he offered the following:

“How did Eklavya gain Drona’s notice? He shot the mouth of a dog shut.”

* * *

And yet it was the mouths of our ancestors and not the mouths of the dogs which were closed. So often our mouths are closed out of habit still, and it is to this impulse that the Weaver Rosenberg speaks.

“You should say the Truth,” he said. “The Truth should be spoken in our tongue, in every tongue! Never mind what happened to Mansur!”

* * *

Friends told him to be careful. Friends warned him against likewise attracting Drona’s attention, of

making him feel a duty to punish Teancum Singh as he had Eklavya.

They advised him, above all, to show a certain outward respect for the status quo. If you speak the truth, they said, do so softly.

“You can push the envelope, Teancum” said one woman, “but gently, so you don’t make a noise by tearing through its edge.”

“I want to break through the envelope” he said, “and then turn back and set it on fire.”

His friends thought he went too far saying so, tempted himself and fate.

They were right.

* * *

“The Prophets are my witnesses” said Rosenberg, “God and Drona have never seen the world in anything like the same way.”

“To Drona, the world simply *is*.” And the Prophets—what do they say? “They show the world as God’s story: unfolding, surprising, a story within a story without beginning or end.”

* * *

Sometimes pieces of that story upset him.

Baruch Moroni Brar records that Teancum once took off his shoes, covered his head, and unrolled another page of the earth, which is a scroll. He wept then, and Baruch asked why. Rosenberg replied that he would have sworn and yelled instead, but that he was trying to act like the God in whose presence we all stand.

(After noting the incident, Brar emphasizes that whichever page we find ourselves standing on, we must not forget that when this world ends, the scroll will be rolled up again.)



* * *

Another time Teancum is said to have witnessed a miracle in the desert: a rock turned into bread. He then asked God to show him a second miracle, and turn the bread into rock again so that he, like Jacob, would have a place to lay his head.

* * *

Why are we drawn to these stories of Teancum, even when they makes the least sense? Perhaps because the role of the protagonist in folktales is to mediate reality, sometimes even by stepping outside of it.

Especially by stepping outside of it, if only to show us that such a space exists.

2

It happened once that Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarphon were in the same Sunday school one week. Teancum Singh was late.

When he arrived, they were discussing the nature of prophetic reliability.

Rabbi Eliezer said “Only when two or more prophets speak the same truth can it be considered equal to a word of the Lord. As it is written, ‘whether by mine own voice or the voice of my servants, it is the same.’ ‘Servants,’ not ‘servant.’ When a prophet speaks alone, he may speak as a man, but when he speaks with the intent and witness of another prophet, their words are surely Ha-Shem’s.”

Rabbi Tarphon, however, said “It is also written, ‘whatsoever they shall speak when moved by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture.’ That is, even the words of a prophet speaking alone are surely of the Lord when he is moved.”

Rabbi Ben Azaryah said, “I am like a man of seventy years old, and yet I could not succeed in interpreting this scripture until Ben Zoma explained it to me. ‘Moved by the Holy Ghost’ means the Prophet cannot remain the same, he must be moved to speak against his natural prejudice and inclinations. Only then are his words surely also the Lord’s words. Otherwise, the counsel is binding but the perfection uncertain.”

Rabbi Akiva then said, “What does the saying mean, that the Prophet will never lead the people

astray? Is it not written, 'all we like sheep have gone astray.'? 'We' is the people, 'All we'—this includes the prophets. And it is also written, "The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen!" It is possible, then, for a Prophet, also, to break faith, for a Prophet, also, to fall."

Teancum Singh answered, and said, "The Prophet can never lead the church away from the Lord because a Prophet can never escape the Lord. As it was in the days of Jonah, so it is in the last days: even a disobedient Prophet does not cease to be a Prophet, and even his rebellion is swallowed up into the purpose of Ha-Shem. A prophet is bound to the Lord, even cursed with Him: as it is written, 'the burden of the word of the Lord.'

"God will forge every prophet into his Story."

* * *

And so he searched again for stories, believing in their potential and malleability, in both their absolute and relative significance. He knocked on the doors, begging people for stories. He knocked on the doors even of abandoned houses, inhabited only by ghosts.

Why did he search, again and again, forgoing meals and abandoning shelters?

"The only way to see this world clearly is to see it from all the different worlds inside of it. That is why only God will ever see this world clearly," he said.

On a certain kind of story: "I don't remember history to avoid repeating it—I know I will repeat it; I am not afraid of repeating it—perhaps this time I will notice the hidden treasures, the unexpected possibilities for healing."

"We move through stories, we love through stories, mothers give birth to children but we have to clothe them in stories or they will freeze in this cold."

"Stories are my meat and drink today" he said. "Stories are this night's shelter."

* * *

Another time Teancum said, "Every movement must have its parables—even Shiva couldn't move the world without the parable of his dance."

"Without stories to move us, we are doomed to stay the same. That is why Drona and his servants hate the stories I search for. But the loss of every

story shrinks the world: does he really want the world to be so small that there will only be room a single eye?"

* * *

"The dogs know I am looking for the scraps they still wish to tear. The swine know I am looking for lost pearls.

"But who am I to stop? Even if they turn and tear me, who am I to stop this gathering I take part in?"

* * *

He had sworn to go to the ends of the earth gathering stories, but his quest took him also to the center. Knowing what the consequences might be, he went and studied in a school that took Drona's image as its Guru as part of his search for a certain story.

When Drona found out, of course, he shut the school down. But not before demanding payment. Teancum offered his thumb, as is customary, but Drona said, "I already have Eklavya's.

"My price is your tongue."

The Weaver Rosenberg shook with rage. Never had he so desperately wished to put a javelin through someone's heart.

* * *

After Drona demanded his tongue, Rosenberg went into a deep depression. He couldn't speak, of course, and the silence was like the Underworld to him.

Perversely, rumors began to spread at that time that the silence had given Rosenberg enlightenment, or that his deep meditations had endowed him with mystical powers.

The only power he ever claimed, in any case, was invisibility.

"The secret," he is said to have written, "is this: learn to see your soul through another mortal's eyes."

* * *

One scrap of his writing from this time has survived, though it may well be a corrupted copy of an earlier document, or else an outright forgery. The scrap includes this line:

“Oh Lord God deliver me in thy due time from the little narrow prison almost as it were total darkness of paper pen and ink and its crooked broken scattered and imperfect language”

* * *

He slept more often than, though fitfully, slept half the day and half the night in restless little snatches.

He dreamed, then, more than usual, they say, and it pained him terribly not to be able to speak the dreams to those around him.

* * *

When awake, he often behaved as though a madman. He pushed rocks up hills and watched them roll down again. He moved into the desert, ate locusts, planted a gourd for shade and then stopped watering it and let the sun scorch his skin.

And yet, some stories say, he was also often coherent and kind when he was awake in those days. Did work for others that was physically demanding and thankless, perhaps trying to wear himself out for his next battle with morning and night, perhaps desperate to keep alive his surviving sense of purpose.

Perhaps he did it to feel whole. Even the broken sometimes feel their wholeness. Somehow, Teancum Singh carried on.

* * *

Did he ever truly despair, ever resent all that he had lived for?

Yes. At least one time.

Some say the silence drove him to it, made him feel as if there were too much trapped under his skin. Others say he was simply tired, and that he likely would have grown tired in any case.

They agree that once, though, he lost the will even to be himself.

In a certain city, he had heard, people who wanted or needed extra time could purchase it from a certain craftsman called the Time-Blower. The Time-Blower would take old, used, unwanted time and draw it out of the bodies of those who wanted themselves lightened of it, then work it in a forge and blow it into shapes for every occasion.

In his storefront, there were round, dense, dark pieces of time for people who needed to

catch up on sleep. There were double-edged pieces on display he blew specially for people to make up missed appointments. The Time-Blower also crafted cavernous clear pieces for people who just needed time to think and squatter, squarish pieces for people to work in. He blew old time into wings for people who wanted to have fun, and hung them right above his window. He made long, curved tubes for children trying to reach a certain age more quickly and kept them in a case behind the counter at the back.

When Teancum approached the Time-Blower and scrawled him a message saying what he had come for, he was ushered out of the storefront and back through an alley to a separate entrance. He heard a drunkard moan. “I think you took more than I’d already forgotten...I told you, I only wanted to lose what I’d been lost for.” The Time-Blower mumbled a quick apology, but the drunk just grunted, then rolled over and fell asleep.

“How much?” asked the Time-Blower.

Rosenberg motioned for paper and pen. “Everything,” he wrote. “It might take a while. The time I keep inside is deeper than I’ve lived for.”

And they say the Time-Blower’s eyes got big and hungry when he took his first real look at the size of Teancum’s veins, thick dark cables that marked their course visibly like river-maps on his skin. The Time-Blower tried his biggest and fastest needles first, then worked his way down to his daintiest and most delicate ones—but every time he’d get the needle in to suck the old time out, the vein would collapse. Sixteen times he tried, until Teancum’s arms were riddled with barren holes and the Time-Blower’s hand ached, but nothing flowed out at all.

Teancum Singh got up and left then.

He was no prophet, but he had his own burden from the Lord.

3

Years of silence taught Teancum, again, how to sleep. He learned a new serenity, one that requires neither reconciliation with nor rejection of things as they are, only patience with the paradox.

He ate consistently again for the first time since he’d lost his tongue, training himself to remember tastes he could no longer experience instead of recoiling at the loss of what our people accept as one of mankind’s most significant senses, the sense that gives



us memories of home and family, a sense that most clearly approximates our souls' ability for longing.

He took, against his former habit, to rising very early, and tried to feel the way Guru Nanak's singing of Japji still hangs in the ambrosial pre-dawn air.

* * *

The world went on without his voice or noticeable influence. Sometimes good, compromised and disfigured almost beyond recognition, triumphed over evil. Sometimes evil triumphed over a few broken fragments of good and then gradually lost force, decaying from active evil into little more than residual momentum.

Tens of thousands were born; tens of thousands died.

Then hundreds of thousands, thousands of thousands, died in the battle at Kurukshetra.

* * *

Kurukshetra.

The very name hangs in the air when spoken; it is a heavy incantation. It summons the smells of charred bodies, sights of death and broken weapons, cataclysmic, mindless slaughter. Did wrong triumph? Did right triumph? We hardly remember; the battle lasted so long, so many last screams long.

Geologists say that limestone is made from compressed biological matter; it is the stone of the once-living. At Kurukshetra you could dig through a foot of human lime.

* * *

They say in the battle, one man ate another's heart in revenge. A perfectly honest man told a lie. A warrior whose identity rested only in his sense of duty had doubts, hesitated to strike. A son of the sun, of the morning, fell—forgetting the words that might have saved him. A land that had been holy was drowned in blood, and when the moon rose at night it was also covered in it.

Half the world died, and Drona died with it.

Baruch Moroni Brar had been there, but survived.

He called Teancum Singh to come salvage something from the carnage.



* * *

Kurukshetra and Cumorah—why is meaning so often hidden under land known for the meaningless? Why are the Golden Plates always hidden under the site of a ghallugara, a holocaust?

At Kurukshetra, Teancum Singh spoke to men's bones, gathered their stories just before they became dust. He spoke to the dust, gathered stories that had lived in men's bones.

How? How did he speak after so many years of such painful silence?

They say that on Drona's corpse he found and reclaimed his own tongue.

* * *

"Once I had wished to kill him for his evil," said Rosenberg, "but every evil has a brother—you could kill the world before evil was stopped.

"And before you could finish," he said, "evil would find you in its line of succession. Perhaps I am evil's brother, too."

* * *

They say he gathered Drona's story, and was taken aback by its beauty. Saw that there was a kind of honesty even in Drona's most brutal betrayals. Saw how Drona, in turn, had been betrayed—by his best-loved pupils, and more deeply still by the very order he had believed in, the very order that is still perpetuated in his name.

They say that passages of the story were so harrowing that they could never be written, only spoken, and that other passages, more moving still, could never be spoken, only sung, and that the most moving passage could only be prayed.

* * *

They say he turned to the future to gather our stories, then...and prayed we'd have the strength to live them. ■

Explanation of Names

BY JAMES GOLDBERG

“Teancum Singh Rosenberg” incorporates characters and ideas from outside sources as though they were a normal part of the world of the story. The following is a limited list of some of the people, places, and ideas referenced. Not everything is included; numerous scriptural passages, for example, are alluded to in the piece but not explained here. Entries are in order of appearance in the text of the story.

KABIR was a fifteenth-century Indian saint. By profession, he was a weaver, but he also wove together Hindu and Muslim traditions in his poetry to emphasize the value of loving God by whatever name. They say that at Kabir’s death, his Hindu followers and Muslim followers got into a fight over the body—Hindus believe in cremation, Muslims in burial. Before they could finish their argument, however, someone noticed that the body had turned into flowers, a fitting end to a unifying figure.

SINGULARITY OF GOD: Both the Jewish Shema and the Muslim doctrine of *tawhid* use words for the “oneness” of God that go beyond the numerical: more than one, they suggest one-of-a-kind. I have “translated” this sentiment as “Singularity” in this case.

HERSHEL OF OSTROPOL is an Eastern European (Ashkenazi) Jewish folk hero, especially in the Hasidic tradition. He’s very clever and gets the better of people by the use or misuse of his wits. I highly recommend looking up some Hershel stories.

NASREDDIN HODJA is a Middle Eastern folk hero. Stories about him often treat him as simple-minded and unintentionally wise, or else as a loveable buffoon whose stories shed great light on life. Often, they have religious double-meanings. There is, for example, a statue in Turkey in which Hodja is seated backward on his donkey. The story goes

that neighbors saw him riding this way one morning and asked why. “He wanted to go one way,” said Hodja, “and I wanted to go another. And so we are compromising.” While the story situates Hodja as a likeable fool, further reflection allows us to consider him as God’s fool: in Islam, God guides our lives absolutely. Why do we so often insist, then, on sitting backwards?

TEANCUM was a Book of Mormon hero, known for his resolute personality. He killed the evil Amalickiah and his brother, dying in the process of the second assassination.

SINGH means “lion” in Punjabi and is the name all Sikh men take, sometimes as a last name, sometimes as a middle name. “Kaur,” meaning *princess*, is the female equivalent.

ROSENBERG is a stereotypical Ashkenazi Jewish last name. The difference between a name like this and a Hebrew name is that it clearly comes from the time of exile and has connotations of living as a Jew in an often-hostile surrounding culture.

EKLAVYA was an archer in the Mahabharata, one of India’s national epic poems. Because of his low caste, Eklavya was rejected as a student at Drona’s academy. In the culture of that time, huge emphasis was placed on the student having the proper guru, or teacher, and Eklavya was set on having Drona as his, so he made an idol of Drona and meditated each morning before it for training on his own. He was soon the world’s greatest archer, better even than Drona’s student, the prince Arjuna. One morning, a barking dog distracted Eklavya and, without looking, he turned and shot the mouth of the dog shut. When Arjuna heard about this, he complained to Drona that another archer surpassed him in skill. Drona investigated the matter, found that Eklavya claimed to be one of his students, and demanded Eklavya’s thumb

as payment in order to reduce his abilities below those of Arjuna. Eklavya, devoted to the teacher he respected so much, willingly complied.

KARNA is also a character from the Mahabharata. He was the oldest son of Kunti, and thus brother to Arjuna, but was raised by a stable-keeper and did not know his birth identity. Because he was assumed to be of a low caste, he was also rejected from Drona's academy. He went to study with another sage and once allowed a worm to bore a hole through his leg in order not to wake the sage by moving or crying out.

TEGH BAHADUR, the ninth Sikh Guru, was beheaded by the Mughal Emperor for advocating religious tolerance. In an attempt to intimidate the now leaderless Sikh community, the Emperor left Tegn Bahadur's body out in a public square with orders that anyone who tried to take it would be put to death. Some faithful Sikhs came by night but succeeded in taking only the head to bring to Tegn Bahadur's widow and young son, Gobind Singh, who became the last Sikh Guru.

NEPHI is a Book of Mormon hero who attempted to trade his family's material possessions in Jerusalem in order to obtain the Brass Plates—a record of his ancestors—for his descendants' use, wherever they chose to resettle.

KORIHOR was a Book of Mormon rebel who challenged the prophet Alma to show him a miracle and was miraculously struck dumb for the remainder of his life.

ETHER was the last prophet of the Jaredite nation, as recorded in the Book of Mormon. He hid in a cavity of a rock to escape the civil war that ultimately destroyed his entire civilization.

THE MESSIAH is someone who will come, end history, and heal all wounds. Whether this coming will be a first visit or a second is a matter of significant debate.

THE ZUGOT were five successive pairs of rabbis who were the most enduring teachers of their age. Hillel and Shammai, for example, had famously opposite emphases.

THE TANNAIM were the Jewish scholar-leaders during the period following the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD. To them lay the impossible task of putting the customs, teachings, and traditions of a lost land and scattered people into a meaningful written form in order to preserve a displaced Judaism through the ages. Judah the Prince, the Rabbi who completed their initial

written work, felt he had only been able to pass on "as much as a dog laps from the sea."

TWO LIONS: Judah is "a lion's whelp," according to Israel's blessing. Sikh men, since Gobind Singh, have likewise taken upon themselves the blessings of a lion.

THE HUMA is an old Iranian legend, often referred to in Sufi mystical parables and poetry.

ELIJAH was a great prophet, with power to shut up the sky, or else call down fire from it. In Mormon thought, he is better known for turning the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers: his spirit is the reason people search out their ancestors and seek a link to them.

THE WESTERN (WAILING) WALL, along with the traditions preserved by the faithful, was all that was left of the Temple after the Romans destroyed it in 70 AD.

DRONA was the most skilled military teacher on earth in Mahabharat times. He trained the Kauravas and the Pandavas, and he rejected Eklavya, Karna, and other low caste students from his academy. He was forced by circumstance to fight for the Kauravas at Kurukshetra and was killed after Yudhistira, the Pandava brother who was perfectly honest, deceived Drona into thinking his son had died. In grief, Drona stopped fighting and was killed.

PANDAVAS were the sons of Pandu, a King in Mahabharat times—and the "good guys" of the story. Pandu died shortly after their birth, and his brother reigned in his place, waiting for them to come of age. They were as follows: Yudhistira, known for honesty; Arjuna, known for intelligence and his skill as an archer; Bhima, known for physical size, strength, and ferocity; and the twins, Nakula and Sahadeva, known for their good looks.

KAURAVAS, the "bad guys" of the Mahabharat, were the evil cousins of the Pandavas. Their father ruled as king after Pandu's death, and they hoped to succeed him, constantly searching for ways to drive the Pandavas from the kingdom.

MANSUR AL-HALLAJ was a tenth-century Sufi saint who felt God so intensely he hardly cared to distinguish himself from that feeling. He once cried out "Ana Al-Haqq" ("I am the Truth") to express this feeling—and was crucified as a blasphemer for doing so, since Truth is one of the names of God in Islam. Eighteenth-century Urdu poet Mir Taqi Mir later penned a couplet in reference to this incident: "Haven't you heard what

happened to Mansur? / Here, if you say the truth, they kill you.”

BARUCH was a companion and scribe to the prophet Jeremiah. When the first copy of the Book of Lamentations was burned by the leaders to whom it had been sent as a warning, Baruch wrote the entire revelation down again.

MORONI was the last prophet of the Nephites in the Book of Mormon, and a guardian of their records, which he buried in a sacred place to preserve for the future.

BRAR is the name of a Jat clan whose members almost all became converts to Sikhism. Known for tenacity and bravery, one of the Brars’ many claims to fame is that they actually attacked and looted Tamerlane’s troops as he was invading and looting India. He burned whole forests trying to destroy the cover and find them.

RABBI ELIEZER ET AL.: These are rabbis from the era of the Tannaim, whose discussions on the meaning of Passover are included in the traditional Passover Haggadah, read by many Jews to this day. The Sunday School scene, in fact, takes the structure of a specific passage in the Haggadah.

SHIVA is a Hindu god. In one form, Shiva performs a cosmic dance that destroys and re-creates the world with each step.

GURU NANAK was the founder of Sikhism. He was an outspoken advocate of family involvement, honest work, charity, and devotion to God, and an opponent of caste distinction, discrimination against women, and religious duplicity.

JAPJI is a short hymn by Guru Nanak which devout Sikhs, including my great-grandmother, get up to sing before the sun rises each morning.

KURUKSHETRA is the name of the battlefield where the Kauravas and Pandavas waged their final war for the kingdom.

CUMORAH was the site of the final battle between Nephites and Lamanites in the Book of Mormon as well as the place where Moroni ultimately hid the abridged records of his people, engraved on plates of gold.

GHALLUGHARA is a word I learned from a primer in the Punjabi alphabet, Gurmukhi. The word means “holocaust” and is often used to refer to two specific periods in which numerous Sikhs were massacred. ■

Interview with James Goldberg

BY NICOLE WILKES



What inspired you to write a piece like “Tales of Teancum Singh Rosenberg”?

The immediate inspiration came from a fiction-writing class I was in. Our first assignment was to write a story that was 300 words or less. I wrote one called “Snow” about an African immigrant to the United States during his first winter. I felt really connected to that story and started writing more, but with a twist: each story was connected to a Jewish holiday. The story where he leaves his homeland is Passover, a story about a wedding of Punjabi immigrants had to do with Rosh Hashanah, and so on.

Because the stories I was writing were so short, I didn’t have time to explain all the culture in them: the Jewish holidays that were thematically connected, the immigrant groups in each story. I figured in the age of Google, smart people could look up the stuff they didn’t get and discover the extra layers in the story, like mining for gems. Understandably, many of my class members didn’t take the time to look stuff up. What surprised me, though, was that the same people who hadn’t invested their time in the story were telling me to simplify it, to explain it more in terms they could understand. Some said they felt like I wasn’t including them because I wasn’t writing in their culture and explaining anything that came from anywhere else. And I thought, these stories wouldn’t be as beautiful if I explained them. And the best readers would get less out of them.

I also thought, I have unique stories to tell because of my own life heritage. Why should I only tell stories you can already fully understand? Isn’t one purpose of fiction to expand the reader? So I decided to write something next that did even more with mixing cultural traditions. I think when

you gets suggestion, you should try to respond to them, but responding doesn’t always mean doing what a suggestion says; sometimes you work against it instead, just to see if you can write that direction too.

The narrative format of this piece is unique, particularly in fiction. Why did you decide to create a fictional folk hero? And what purpose does using one of Rosenberg’s followers as a narrator fulfill?

I guess the idea came from the name itself. When I decided to write a story in which I was free to use the stories I came from, I came up with the name “Teancum Singh Rosenberg.” It was almost a joke at first: I’m going to create this guy with a first name so Book of Mormon I’ve never actually met anyone with it, the middle name all Sikh men take, and a sort of stereotypical Eastern European Jewish last name.

It’s not enough for the guy to exist, though. The complaint about the previous piece had been that some people wanted me to do the work of interpreting any culture that was not their own for them. So for this piece, the narrator was from the same culture as Teancum Singh Rosenberg, not at all from modern American culture. You couldn’t ask him to make things clearer to a modern American audience because he’s so clearly not one of us.

And then the stories he tells: they’re not really the story of Teancum Singh; he’s not laying out his own entire culture. This unnamed narrator is telling us the fragmentary kinds of stories that matter deeply to him, and I’m asking you to look at those stories and let them mean something for you. You can do that by taking them as you understand them now, or you can do that by looking up some

of the extra Jewish/Sikh/Mormon/Indian mythological references that inform the stories.

Drona is a historical figure in India. He is known as a great teacher, but you present him as Rosenberg's adversary. What inspired that choice?

Drona is from the Mahabharata, one of India's great national epics. He had a military academy where he taught all the best students, including the Pandavas, the "good guys" of the Mahabharat, and the Kauravas, their evil and ambitious cousins. He rejected anyone from the lower castes, no matter how skilled. That includes both Eklavya and Karna, two of my favorite characters.

Eklavya was from the forest and was a great self-taught archer. When he was rejected from the academy, he decided to make himself a statue of Drona and revered it as his teacher—teachers are a big deal in ancient Indian culture. One morning, Eklavya was sitting before his Drona idol meditating, and a dog barking in the distance distracted him. Without even looking, just by sound, Eklavya shot the mouth of the dog shut.

Arjuna, one of the Pandavas, saw it and complained to Drona—hadn't Drona promised to make him, Arjuna, the best archer in the world? Drona went and found Eklavya, who was ecstatic for a visit from the man he literally idolized. When Drona saw the statue, he asked Eklavya if he truly considered himself one of Drona's disciples. Eklavya said

yes, and Drona asked if he would be willing to pay him a teacher's fee. Instead of money or service, he insisted that Eklavya cut off his own thumb and pay it as "tuition." Eklavya did, making Arjuna, by default, the greatest archer in the world.

I never got over that story. When I was a kid, I used to hide my thumb behind my hand and stare, thinking about what it would be like to cut off my own thumb like that. I admired Eklavya, and I resented the sacrifice he made. In some ways, Teancum Singh Rosenberg was a way for me to revisit that old, old story and tell it with some resistance.

As an LDS writer, what do you feel is your greatest responsibility to the stories of Latter-day Saints?

To help keep them alive. Always. We say we are a true and living church, and that's a commission as much as a fact. Every generation has to keep the gospel living, and part of the way we do that is by caring for our sacred stories. We meet three hours a week just to think about what they mean! Part of "Teancum Singh Rosenberg," I think, is about trying to help people get a sense of our urgent human need for stories. Stories bind families, embody truth, give us space for thinking. We can't ignore that. The Lord doesn't want us to.

Whether it's in family history, scripture study, or our relationships with each other, I hope we all take stories seriously. They're not just for writers and artists. ■

Essay on “Tales of Teancum Singh Rosenberg”

BY NICOLE WILKES

James kneels on the floor beside my daughter’s bed. “Once upon a time,” he starts, “there was a little girl named Kira.” Kira smiles, even though each night the story has the same beginning. Sometimes James spins stories about supernatural animals; other times Kira adventures with friends. The story always closes with bedtime, a sleepy little girl curled up with her bear.

The night before a campaign, ancient Greek soldiers would share stories of epic heroes whose bravery was more than legend—it was inspiration. In each legend enemies could have been extraordinary, a cyclops, Titan, or a god, or mortal men known for their cunning and skill, but all were a challenge to the warrior. Sometimes the hero triumphed; other times he fell. The story always closed with the message of bravery, honor, and the hope to become a legend.

Perhaps the bedtime story does not feed the nationalistic pride that a heroic legend does, but including a child in her own fantastical adventures expands her possibilities. We may believe that we use story for entertainment, passively viewing television or talking with our friends. But story maintains its place in our culture because it inspires us; we are drawn together through story.

“Tales of Teancum Singh Rosenberg” plays with story—the way stories shape a people, the way we are each shaped by story. Laid out like a loose tapestry of folktales, the tales weave together

stories from three distinctive religious backgrounds: Judaism, Mormonism, and Sikhism. At first these three religions appear to be at odds—could a family celebrate both Christmas and Hanukkah? How does one resolve the tensions of multiple cultural inheritances? Through story.

Teancum Singh Rosenberg is the legendary hero of a people whose identity has been shaped by story, not just by Rosenberg’s tales, but all of the stories he collected. Rosenberg seeks stories inside caves and under rocks, from the bones of the dead and from angels. His people gather Rosenberg’s legends and bind themselves together in the tales they have woven.

But this binding of story to a people, a family, an individual—this is not unique to the fictional culture in “Teancum Singh Rosenberg.” If we remember that Mormon was a keeper of story and Moroni’s only company was written on the Golden Plates, story is central in our religion. Though we walk down modern streets in a modern world, we carry the legacies of pioneers, Nephites, Hebrew prophets, and our ancestors. It is through storytelling that we maintain connections with our heritage. Our stories may be fragmented, but they are ours.

Teancum teaches his people, “We move through stories, we love through stories, mothers give birth to children, but we have to clothe them in stories or they will freeze in this cold.” Let us each continue to weave the cloth of story to keep warm. ■

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