

No, Ma'am, That's Not History

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A Brief Review of Mrs. Brodie's Reluctant Vindication of a Prophet She Seeks to Expose

Reprinted by permission from *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass*, volume 11 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 3—52.

Preface

When the writer first read Mrs. Brodie's book thirteen years ago he was struck by the brazen inconsistencies that swarm in its pages, and so wrote this hasty review. At that time he had no means of knowing that inconsistency was the least of the author's vices, and assumed with other reviewers that when she cited a work in her footnotes, she had actually read it, that when she quoted she was quoting correctly, and that she was familiar with the works in her bibliography. Only when other investigations led the reviewer to the same sources in ensuing years did the extent of Mrs. Brodie's irresponsibility become apparent. While a large book could (and probably should) be devoted to this remarkable monument of biographical mendacity,¹ more than a decade of research abetted by correspondence with Mrs. Brodie's defenders has failed to discredit a single observation made in our 1946 review, which is printed here with only a few typographical errors corrected.²

What Brought This On

People are still trying to explain Joseph Smith. That is as it should be, for no man who claims as much as he did should go unchallenged. Joseph Smith's own story is by no means the only possible explanation of his career; for everything in the universe there are as many explanations at hand as the mind is willing to devise. Only one rule must be observed; it is the old "law of parsimony"—of all explanations of a thing, the one which is the simplest, i.e., the freest from contradiction, requiring the fewest qualifications and the least elaboration of explanation, must be given preference to the exclusion of all others.

The latest explanation of Joseph Smith is Mrs. Brodie's.³ It is not animated by violent hatred. That fact is reassuring but, strangely enough, irrelevant. The average man is as free from prejudice as Thadamanthus when it comes to tensor analysis or the interpretation of Sumerian texts—but that does not qualify him to speak on either subject, and if Mrs. Brodie preserved the calm of a Nestor we would still have to judge her explanation strictly on its own merits, and not assume that she must be telling the truth because she is not mad at anybody.

Brodie takes an awful beating from the law of parsimony. Far simpler and more to the point are the thumping biographies of an earlier day, which simply announced that the man Joseph Smith was a complete scamp, and there an end—simple and direct. With that same admirable simplicity and directness, these authors ran headlong into a brick wall of contradictions, and that was their undoing. Altogether too much is known about Joseph Smith to let the "total depravity" theory get by. So Mrs. Brodie will qualify it by introducing into the picture an element which she thinks solves everything: Joseph Smith was a complete imposter, the new light teaches, but *hemeant well*. He was just an easy-going rustic with

irresponsible ways and an overactive imagination. That takes care of everything.

But as soon as we get down to cases, the new and humane interpretation of the Prophet, far from improving things, makes everything much worse. Brodie's Joseph Smith is a more plausible character than the consummate fiend of the earlier school in that his type is much more likely to be met with on the street any Tuesday afternoon. But he is actually much *less* plausible as the man who accomplished what Joseph Smith did. Some kind of an inspired super-devil might have gotten away with some of the things he did, but no blundering, dreaming, undisciplined, shallow and opportunistic fakir could have left behind what Joseph Smith did, both in men's hearts and on paper.

Brodie's task is to fit the recorded words and acts of one Joseph Smith to her idea of a well-meaning but not too reliable oaf. To do this the words and acts in question must be changed around a bit: there must be a good deal of critical interpretation and explaining in the light of the answer she wants to get. All this is pardonable if it does not go too far. But how far does it go? That is the all-important question which can be answered only by consulting the book itself.

After a glance at those learned pages we shall be able to point out a real and solid contribution which Mrs. Brodie has made to the advancement of knowledge. It is in view of that contribution that we are moved to discuss a work that might otherwise have been gravely misunderstood. We believe in giving credit where credit is due—but not elsewhere—and for that reason take the pains to point out a few interesting aspects of Mrs. Brodie's celebrated biography.

A Little Discourse on Method

Brodie begins her study with the observation that though there is no lack of documents for the history of Joseph Smith, these documents are "fiercely contradictory."⁴ In that case, it is necessary for a writer to pick and choose his evidence. Now, by the simple process of picking and choosing one's evidence, one may prove absolutely anything. For which reason it is important to ask what principle Mrs. Brodie follows in making her choice.

This is not hard to discover. Our guide first makes up her mind about Joseph Smith and then proceeds to accept any and all evidence, from whatever source, that supports her theory.⁵ The uncritical acceptance of evidence from all sources gives her work at first glance an air of great impartiality. At the same time she rejects any and all evidence, from whatever source, that refutes her settled ideas.

Thus she flatly rejects the sworn affidavit of fifty-one of Joseph's neighbors because their testimony does not suit her idea of the Prophet's character.⁶ We would applaud such strong-mindedness were it not that on the very next page she accepts the stories of the same witnesses regarding "seer stones, ghosts, magic incantations, and nocturnal excavations."⁷ Now scandal stories thrive notoriously well in rural settings, while the judgment of one's neighbors regarding one's general character over a number of years is far less likely to run into the fantastic. Yet Brodie can reject the character witnesses as prejudiced while accepting the weirdest extravagances of their local gossip.

In the same spirit, John C. Bennett and Joseph H. Jackson, who are "unreliable witnesses, to say the least,"⁸ become reliable

sources whenever their testimony supports Brodie, and hopelessly prejudiced when it does not.

"The press accounts" (there is only one such "account") of the charlatan [Luman] Walters "stated significantly that when he left the neighborhood, his mantle fell upon young Joseph Smith."⁹ What is "significant" about it? What is meant by the vague figure of speech more than that one scamp was succeeded by another? Even Obadiah Dogberry [a.k.a. Abner Cole] does not do more than insinuate that Joseph was one of Walter's audience of yokels. Why should his bitter enemies not come out and say he was Walter's disciple if he was—why nothing but an extremely noncommittal hint and a veiled figure of speech if they had anything at all to go by? Yet this is the whole evidence for one of Brodie's proudest discoveries. For her it is an absolute certainty upon which she repeatedly insists,¹⁰ that Walters was Joseph's most particular teacher.

"No two of Joseph's neighbors had the same version of the story" of the plates, we are told.¹¹ What does one do in that case? One simply accepts or rejects the stories according to one's own fancy. This is fun until one runs up against flatly contradictory evidence that cannot be sidestepped or ignored. Regarding the claims that no one ever saw anything but an empty box, Brodie sagely observes: "It is difficult to reconcile this explanation with the fact that these witnesses, and later Emma and William Smith, emphasized the size, weight, and metallic texture of the plates."¹² Yes, how do you reconcile them? Here is Brodie's method: "Exactly how Joseph Smith persuaded so many of the reality of the golden plates is neither so important nor so baffling as the effect of this success on Joseph himself."¹³ Whereupon she drops the question for good. There may be ten thousand things

more important and baffling than the problem of disproving the plates, but that fact has no bearing on the problem and can hardly pass for a solution in a book "where honesty and integrity presumably should count for something."¹⁴ She is simply side-stepping the issue, and the law of parsimony screams bloody murder: It must have an explanation of those plates, but such is not forthcoming from our oracle.

"The Hebraic origin of the Indians [is an idea which] seems to have come chiefly from a popular book by Ethan Smith" entitled *View of the Hebrews*.¹⁵ Though this possibility quickly becomes a dead certainty for Brodie, "it may never be proved that Joseph saw *View of the Hebrews* before writing the Book of Mormon."¹⁶ Since there is nothing in his own words to give him away, that, for Brodie, is proof that he was careful to cover up his traces. What proves the stealing of the Book of Mormon from Ethan Smith is the presence of "striking parallelisms" between the two.¹⁷ This brings up a very important aspect of the Brodie method, namely, the use of parallels as an argument. It has become the favorite device of non-Mormon writers. Oriental literature bristles with parallels to the Book of Mormon that are far more full and striking than anything that can be found in the West.

There are "outside" parallels for every event in the Old and New Testaments, yet that does not prove anything. Of recent years, literary studies have shown parallels not to be the exception but the rule in the world of creative writing, and it is well known that great inventions and scientific discoveries have a way of appearing at about the same time in separate places. A scholar by the name of Karl Joel has recently amassed a huge amount of material on the subject,¹⁸ and though we need not accept his

conclusion that the same sort of thing that is happening in one place at a given time will be found to be happening all over the world at the moment (!), still his vast volumes present a great wealth of undeniable parallels. The fact that two theories or books present parallelisms, no matter how striking, may imply a common source, but it certainly does not in itself prove that the one is derived from the other. We know (thanks to Brodie) that there was a great and widespread interest in the Indian problem in Joseph's day, and we also know that these people of that day had a way of referring everything to the Bible; in that case it is hard to see how anyone could have avoided the Indian-Hebrew tie-up.

Mrs. Brodie sees parallels everywhere. To cite a few of her howlers, there is the case of a herdsman who kills a number of rustlers with a sword. Now herdsmen have been fighting with rustlers since the dawn of time, but for Brodie this is simply a direct steal from the story of David and Goliath. Again, the barges of the Jaredites "contained everything which the settlers might need on the new continent,"¹⁹ like any Chinese junk, Viking ship, or the *Mayflower* itself; in fact, ships have a way of carrying with them whatever the personnel will need. Brodie, however, knows that the whole thing is a dishonest adaptation of Noah's ark. Certain fortifications of earth and timbers mentioned in the Book of Mormon resemble those in western New York—also, we add, in Russia, England, Africa, France, China, and everywhere else. Such structures are universally common to a certain type of warlike culture. At one place in the Book of Mormon, atheism is denounced; since there were atheists on the frontier, Brodie knows that the whole idea is simply an adaptation of the local scene.²⁰ The fact that atheism has been an issue in sundry civilizations since the world began means nothing to our author;

she chooses her parallels as she chooses her evidence—where it suits her.

Sidney Rigdon once in an article "openly quoted" from Thomas Dick's *Philosophy of a Future State*.²¹ That to Brodie *proves* that Joseph Smith "had recently been reading" the book.²² Dick mentions the old familiar doctrine that the stars may be inhabited by intelligent *progressive* beings. So Brodie knows that all the Prophet's "later teachings [on the subject] came directly from Dick."²³ He could not very well have gotten his *earlierteachings* from Dick, though his later teachings are simply a continuation of them. Yet as soon as a work appears that resembles what he is doing, Brodie immediately pounces upon it as the Prophet's only source. If she would show how the doctrine of progress was stolen from Dick, the lady should not have been at such pains to show that progressivism had been a basic part of its background from the first.

A useful form of parallel is the "identical anecdote." To prove Joseph Smith's dishonesty in operating the bank, "several apostates at different times related an identical anecdote" about money-boxes.²⁴ Now, identical anecdotes can be assumed to indicate a common source, but no more: they say nothing as to the nature of that source or its reliability. For Mrs. Brodie the fact that they are identical proves not that they are commonly derived, but that they are actually true! What kind of history is that? The greatest possible wealth of "identical anecdotes" attests the orgies in the temple, and yet Brodie does not hesitate to scout the lot as absolutely worthless, identical or not. How infinitely weaker is the "whispered talk"²⁵ which attests the activities of the Danites? Yet Mrs. Brodie accepts it, forsooth, because it is "fragmentary [to say the least], but consistent."²⁶ The stories once current about the

nocturnal orgies of the early Christians and the child-eating rites of the Jews were not too fragmentary and were remarkably consistent—only they weren't true.

"Bald parallels of Masonic oaths"²⁷ the lady finds particularly crude. How did he dare it? Why didn't he disguise it?²⁸ The answer is that to those who know both, the resemblance is not striking at all; it is not nearly so striking as the resemblance between the church Joseph Smith founded and the other churches, and yet even though the Mormon Church and these institutions present one parallel after another, they are really totally different in form and meaning.

Speaking of parallels, however, one cannot pass by one of the most remarkable studies in religious parallels ever written. The name of the most learned man who ever made a study of the Mormons, and one of the best-informed men who ever lived, does not appear in Mrs. Brodie's pages. At the end of the last century, the great tradition of European scholarship in the grand style culminated in the person of Eduard Meyer. If he did not have the stature of some earlier scholars, it is certain that he was in a position to survey and assimilate more of the learning of the past than any human being before or since his day. To his famous rotunda at the University of Berlin flowed, as it has never flowed since, all the learning of the ages for his examination and exploitation. No other man ever combined the learning both of the East and the classical world in a work of such high and lasting authority as Meyer's *Geschichte des Altertums* - the ultimate and, in fact, the last general history of antiquity to be the work of a single mind.²⁹

This man had a particular interest in ancient religions, and it occurred to him that in Mormonism he might study at first hand how a real religion gets started. So impressed was he by the possibilities of such a study that he packed up and went to Utah in 1904, to devote a year of his priceless time to studying the Mormons. Few churches have had the good fortune to be examined at first hand by a man of such vast learning and complete impartiality. For in keeping with the high *Wissenschaft* of his day, Meyer himself professed no religion. He was neither partial nor hostile to the Mormons, who as far as his feelings were concerned might have been beings on another planet or a heap of ants.

Meyer's entire *Ursprung und Geschichte der Mormonen* is a study in parallels, comparing the new religion with revealed religions of the past.³⁰ While grandly contemptuous of Joseph Smith's low coefficient of Kultur, the great savant illustrates at length the "exact identity" of his Church both in "atmosphere" and sundry particulars with that of the early Christians. A "striking and irrefutable" parallelism supports Mormon claims to revelation; "with perfect right" they identify themselves with the apostolic church of old. The similarity extends to the faults as well as the virtues of the Prophet and his followers—they may be matched "at every point" by the faults and virtues of the ancient prophets and the ancient church. We shall have occasion to refer to Eduard Meyer a number of times below, not because he was favorably disposed (he is in fact far less sympathetic than Brodie), but because with his infinitely greater knowledge he reaches such totally different conclusions. He is a necessary "control" in testing our author.

Incidentally, the faithful need not be too utterly crushed by Brodie's erudite announcement that the word "Nauvoo" is purely a figment of Smith's imagination,³¹ since no less an Orientalist than Meyer himself is naive enough to be taken in by the Prophet's ruse. He observes that the word is a plain transliteration of the Hebrew *nava*, which is feminine (the proper gender for place names) and happens to mean "the beautiful."³² Mrs. Brodie can put her stuffed mourning-dove back into its box now: her philology is of the same brand as her history.

Evolution at Any Price

Of all Mrs. Brodie's preconceived ideas, the most fundamental is her certainty that Joseph Smith did not receive revelations. That sudden and dazzling enlightenment which is the essence of religious experience of the highest sort is unthinkable in his case. All his own statements on the subject are to be discarded out of hand. To Brodie "there are few men, however, who have written so much and told so little about themselves."³³ Which is simply to say that though Joseph Smith tells a great deal about himself, Brodie chooses not to believe it.

Instead, she will cling to the theory that all the Prophet's thought and action were the result of a slow and gradual evolution. This is an easy mechanical rule-of-thumb that may be employed to make any thesis sound very scientific. The first objection to it Brodie ignores entirely; namely, the well-known fact that great religious conviction is usually born of sudden insight. Other religious leaders may have their moments of inspiration, but in Joseph's case everything is slow and gradual.

Barring this objection, how does Mrs. Brodie support her evolutionary theory? To begin with, there was no "first vision." True, such visions "were common in the folklore of the area"³⁴ and Joseph was the most imaginative youth in the world; still, *he* had no such vision—not even a false one! The proof is that the newspapers say nothing about it. The argument of silence is always a suspicious one, yet how much more suspicious when we are told that "there are no detailed descriptions of the revivals in Palmyra and Manchester—when they were at their wildest?"³⁵ If the press ignores the revivals at their wildest, why should it not ignore a mere episode of the movement? Joseph Smith specifically says it was the ministers who united to persecute him—it was persecution from the pulpit (*not*, as Brodie insinuates, a sort of militant mob movement). But, says Brodie, these same newspapers "in later years gave him plenty of unpleasant publicity."³⁶ In later years he was an important public figure with a large following—their silence at this time merely proves his own statement (that he was "an obscure boy"³⁷ (JS-H 1:23) and anything but news.

If Joseph Smith claimed to have had a vision in 1820, the newspapers "took no notice of Joseph's vision at the time it was supposed to have occurred" *or at any other time.*³⁸ Therefore we can only conclude that no such claim was made, either in 1820 or at any other time. The last clause nullifies the whole argument, for if the silence of the newspapers is proof of anything, then Joseph Smith never at any time claimed to have had the vision, which Brodie knows is false.

However, she hastens to corroborate the silence of the press with the testimony of Obadiah Dogberry: "It is well known that Joe Smith never pretended to have any communion with angels until a

long period after the *pretended* finding of his book."³⁹ Even if Dogberry were a reliable witness (which he definitely is not), we can only ask, "well known" to whom? Why, indeed, to the thousands of people to whom the Prophet never mentioned his visions. A million people in London and Paris could have sworn affidavits that Joseph Smith never told them a thing about the angel; the entire city of Peking and large areas of the Central Sudan could honestly report that they had never been informed of Moroni's visit. That Joseph Smith should not noisily divulge the great and sacred things he had been ordered to keep secret does not seem possible to Brodie. If the first vision was so "soul-shattering,"⁴⁰ how, she asks triumphantly, could it have "passed totally unnoticed in Joseph's home town?"⁴¹ It never occurs to her that there are things, especially if they are of a transcendent and "soul-shattering" nature, which one does not run off to report to the press and the neighbors.⁴² Joseph reported his vision only to his family and to a minister he thought he could trust. It was the minister who caused the trouble.

What was the first vision, then? A remembered dream, says Brodie, "created some time after 1834,"⁴³ for "dream images came easily to this youth"⁴⁴—in 1834, that is, but not in 1820!

As a final clincher to her argument of silence against the first vision, our author points out that in 1820 Joseph was not religious at all: "he reflected the irreligion and cynicism of his father,"⁴⁵ he was merely a "likable ne'er-do-well,"⁴⁶ "inimune to religious influence of any sort."⁴⁷ Later on, after the first vision has been thus debunked and forgotten, in order to prove something else, Brodie flatly refutes all these judgments as worthless: "It is clear that he was keenly alert to the theological differences dividing the sects and was genuinely interested in the controversies."⁴⁸ Now it

is his version she is accepting, and that in the teeth of all testimony to the contrary. If that much of his story turns out to be true against positive testimony, what about the rest of the story? There is no contemporary mention of Joseph's religious propensities, and yet those propensities are real, Brodie decides; the same sources fail to mention his most intimate and hidden religious experience—therefore such an experience never occurred, Brodie decides!

The next major issue is the Book of Mormon. "For a long time," we are told, "Joseph was *extremely reluctant* to talk about the plates."⁴⁹ Extremely reluctant indeed; why didn't he simply let the matter drop? Because "once the masquerade had begun, there was no point at which he could call a halt."⁵⁰ Why not? Everyone would have been glad to forget the business. If his own family believed implicitly in the plates they never saw, they certainly would believe in any explanation he might give for their disappearance: they willingly accepted his story later that the angel had taken the plates back. And was Joseph of the super-resourceful imagination, devious, cunning, agile and "utterly opportunistic" in the matter of the Book of Mormon, the one to be at a loss for explanations? Why did he hang on to the plates that no one could see, that only made trouble, that he hated to talk about? Surely he of all persons could think of a better game than that. And at the time, remember, he had absolutely no conception of the Book of Mormon-to-be, according to Brodie.⁵¹

The writing of the first one hundred and sixteen pages was "painfully slow, â€[for] Joseph had yet to learn how to write,"⁵² a long and difficult process at best. Yet less than a year later we find him tossing off a 275,000-word manuscript in three months! This feat simply proves to Brodie that Joseph Smith's stupidity has

been deliberately exaggerated: he was really rather smart. Only she resolutely refuses to face the problem she has raised: Here was a man of twenty-two giving free rein to a "completely undisciplined imagination,"⁵³ an imagination that "spilled over like a spring freshet"⁵⁴ in a riot of intense color and luxuriant detail, a wild, unbridled fancy that was not to be "canalized by any discipline";⁵⁵ the man sits behind a curtain and dictates to a semiliterate peasant on the other side ("none of Joseph's secretaries knew the rudiments of punctuation").⁵⁶ He simply dictates: He takes no notes and holds no conferences, for he must impress his secretaries and not appeal to them for aid—once a sentence is spoken "revision was therefore unthinkable,"⁵⁷ says Brodie. What a hilarious document this will turn out to be! What an impossible tangle of oriental vagaries, what threads and tatters of half-baked narrative losing themselves in contradictory masses, what an exuberance of undisciplined fancies flying off at wild tangents! What a wealth of irrelevant sermonizing at unexpected moments (as in the Koran), what a collection of bizarre conceits and whopping contradictions it must be! Surely all one needs to do is to cite a page of the stuff—any page—to expose the whole business; a few of these obviously faked passages will do the trick far more simply and effectively than the laborious chapters Mrs. Brodie devotes to it. Why the laborious chapters? Because the inevitable flaws of a book produced in the manner Brodie describes strangely fail to appear! Instead of an opium dream, we find an exceedingly sober document, that never flies off at tangents, never loses the thread of the narrative (which is often quite complicated), is totally lacking in oriental color, in which the sermons are confined to special sections, and which, strangest of all, never runs into contradictions. Joseph might get away with his "outrageous lying"⁵⁸ in little matters, but what outrageous liar

can carry the game to half the length of the Old Testament without giving himself away hundreds of times? Brodie doesn't say.

Early in her book the lady prepares us for the Book of Mormon by making much of Joseph's gaudy imagination, and especially of his skill in holding everybody spellbound for hours by his exotic and colorful tales. Why, then, is the Book of Mormon, his best effort, simply "chloroform in print,"⁵⁹ lacking all the qualities for which the author was remarkable? Why does the language, with its strained and remarkably Semitic structure, in no way resemble his own vigorous and extravagant prose?

To prove that the Book of Mormon was the product of gradual evolution, Mrs. Brodie maintains with great insistence that until the first one hundred and sixteen pages were finished it was not a religious book at all but "merely an ingenious speculation,"⁶⁰ "a mere money-making history of the Indians";⁶¹ as to the plates themselves "no *divine* interposition had been *dreamed of*."⁶² Yet all along these plates had been "too sacred to be seen,"⁶³ nay, according to Brodie, Joseph maintained that the very sight of them would strike one dead!⁶⁴ And it never occurred to him for a moment that such a singularly holy document might have even the slightest religious significance!

To demonstrate how the book evolved, Brodie observes that it improves in style and story as it goes along. That is *her* version: to others the first part of the book is by far the most interesting. Anyway, as he was finishing it up, the Prophet, being worried about the scientific aspects of what he had produced, decided, according to Mrs. Brodie, to add another book (Ether) to it. In this book, designed specifically to correct the unscientific tone of the rest, he was far more careless than ever before, mentioning all

sorts of domestic beasts "when it was known even in his own day [and very well to a man of his sly researches] that Columbus had found the land devoid of these species."⁶⁵

In criticizing the Book of Mormon or any of the other writings of Joseph Smith, it is necessary first of all to find out what these writings say. The theories and doctrines which Mrs. Brodie exposes are not found in these books, but are picked up from various people's ideas about them. The Book of Mormon has suffered particularly from a glib jumping at conclusions by its attackers. The book describes the doings of "a lonesome and a solemn people" (Jacob 7:26) who do not claim for a moment to be the sole inhabitants of the hemisphere. When Brodie talks of Mound-builders and Mongolians,⁶⁶ she is not talking about the Book of Mormon at all; she is setting up a straw man for her "science" to "disembowel."⁶⁷

Having finished the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith "was rapidly acquiring the language and even the accent of sincere faith."⁶⁸ He had no sincere faith, you understand; what he had been through in the past had been merely drill to improve his "accent." Next "he slipped into" the role of Prophet "with ease, without the inner turmoil that preceded the spiritual fervor of so many of the great religious figures of the past."⁶⁹ The fact that Joseph is the only prophet, true or false, who never once gave evidence of doubting his calling, closely engaged the attention of the great Eduard Meyer, to whom the explanation is obvious: the Prophet had a vision—a real vision—right at the outset of his career.⁷⁰ If we do not accept that interpretation, we must follow Mrs. Brodie's psychological gymnastics. Joseph Smith was a deceiver, she decides, and "the casual reader will be shocked by his deceptionsâ€”in the field of religion, where honesty and integrity

presumably should count for something."⁷¹ He had no honesty or integrity; instead he had a "highly compensated" but "very real sincerity";⁷² however, he had no real faith. And so, now you know: "What Joseph had created," our authority tells us, "was essentially an evangelical socialism, which made up in moral strength what it lacked in grandeur."⁷³ So, you see, the "completely undisciplined imagination,"⁷⁴ devoid of honesty and integrity⁷⁵ and lacking, moreover, "the diligenceâ€[and] the constancy to master reality"⁷⁶ produces an organization noted for its lasting stability and characterized by great moral strength! What kind of reasoning is that? If there is anything which should mark a brainchild of Brodie's Joseph, it would be a tendency to grandeur and a lack of moral strength: just the opposite is found to be the case.

Next, in the process of Joseph's evolution an amazing thing happens: he performs a miraculous healing. "Joseph must have been overwhelmed by this miracle," says our shrewd informant, "for he had *no idea* how common were such occurrences."⁷⁷ No idea! And that after Brodie has been at pains to tell us how he had grown up in a world of "faith healers and circuit-rider evangelists"⁷⁸ and camp-meeting miracles. Miracles of this sort had been his everyday fare from infancy, and yet in 1830 he has no idea that faith cures are common occurrences. His performance is not half as overwhelming as Brodie's discovery.

Shortly after this, Joseph founds the Church and "with an insight rare among the prophets of his own generation, he did not make a complete break with the past. He continued the story, he did not present a new cosmology."⁷⁹ In her summing up, however, our author takes the Prophet severely to task for his "insight" and speaks bitter words: "Within the dogma of the Church there is no

new Sermon on the Mount [why should there be?—the old one is good enough], no *new* saga of redemption."⁸⁰ Joseph Smith, according to her, should have brought a *new* saga of redemption; she is actually disgusted with the man because he makes no attempt, absolutely none, to displace Jesus Christ! She is equally disgusted when at this time he speaks through revelation, depending on God rather than standing squarely on his own feet.⁸¹ This to her can only mean that he is still "troubled by a sense of inadequacy."⁸²

This sort of forced and predetermined reasoning makes one wonder, but no more so than her observations on the coined word *telestial* and the idea of a third degree of glory as that of the stars.⁸³ It is almost unbelievable that anyone presuming to write on religion should not be perfectly familiar with this very well-established and ancient doctrine—it is regular old stock-in-trade in ancient times, though the sources were not accessible to Joseph Smith. They were accessible to Brodie, if she is competent to judge of religious matters; and, true or false, the doctrine is anything but the fantastic aberration she makes it out to be.

At the end of 1832, we find Joseph Smith at last "taking himself very seriously as a prophet."⁸⁴ And that *after* the Book of Mormon and the revelations and visions founding the Church! He is moreover "*beginning* to grasp *something* of the tremendous potentiality of his power."⁸⁵ That *after* his repeated descriptions of himself as the key character in the dispensation of the fulness of times. Yet, at the end of 1833 he is "racked with a sense of impotence and irresolution,"⁸⁶ without substantial "certainty of the divinity of his mission."⁸⁷ It will be seen that Brodie's argument throughout the whole period rests ultimately on nothing but her

own insight into the inner, nay the unconscious, mind of the Prophet.

Keeping to the evolution-at-any-price method, Brodie notes that in 1834, "little by little Joseph came to understand how basic were the animosities between his people and the old settlers,"⁸⁸ for of course it would never occur to him that there might be a basic animosity between his "small and peculiar people" and what he had repeatedly described as the doomed and wicked world of the last days. It was only with the troubles of Zion's Camp, we are told, that he was shocked by a "first-hand acquaintance with the ferocity of anti-Mormonism."⁸⁹ The affair in Ohio, where he had been the special victim of concentrated and deadly mob fury, and the awful times in Missouri, could not possibly have made an impression on him, for, don't you see, all this is a matter of slow and gradual evolution.

Now comes a "subtle change in his public attitude toward learning."⁹⁰ "Flinging aside his cloak of omniscience"⁹¹ (not a very subtle gesture), he no longer "exulted in his lack of learning."⁹² How a pretension to omniscience can go hand in hand with pretensions to gross ignorance is not clear—especially since the omniscience was of a very tangible sort, dealing with all kinds of ancient language and scientific truth. "Now he was *at last* pursuing knowledge the hard way," and Brodie applauds.⁹³ But in doing so she raises (and ignores) a very tough question. The hard research necessary to have produced the Book of Mormon, even as a work of pure fiction, must have been colossal; and if there were *no* such research, then its production was at least a hundred times harder. Remembering all those details without notes; preserving an even tone and regular flow, and that, without any revision or rewriting, or shuffling of notes;

the mere writing of a big book—that takes *hard* thinking. It is a book, moreover, that "shows elaborate design, its narrative is spun coherently, and it demonstrates throughout a unity of purpose"⁹⁴ according to Brodie—to have produced it with all the notes and aids and reference books in the world would have taken *hard* work. Yet our guide insists that Joseph Smith never studied "the hard way" until 1833. If this is so, how did he produce the Book of Mormon? Yet he no sooner suffers this change of heart than the Prophet basely reverts again "into accustomed paths and [dictates] a translation by direct inspiration from heaven."⁹⁵ The fact that he is not keeping the rule and evolving according to schedule disgusts our researcher.

Then in 1836, being a man with "a hard core of common sense"⁹⁶ and a "shrewd understanding"⁹⁷ and moreover a complete and very resourceful opportunist, and much worried about the scientific risks his Book of Mormon was running, Joseph Smith proceeds to lay himself wide open to the ridicule of scholars by a number of very daring Egyptian interpretations.⁹⁸ The only way to judge these is to present the documents to Egyptian scholars who have no knowledge of their history in America and compare their judgments with each other and with the Prophet's. This has never been done. If we are to believe the latest authoritative utterance on the subject,⁹⁹ the dogmatic certitude of another day may well yield to the humble acknowledgment that the real meaning of many Egyptian texts still eludes us. At any rate it is anything but the open-and-shut proposition that Brodie, the glib English major, makes it out to be.

In the affairs of the bank, the Saints were "robbed, abused and insulted" by the Prophet.¹⁰⁰ Only, strangely, they were not aware of the fact or seemed actually to enjoy it. It is not odd that "the

gentiles shook their heads in wonder" at this strange contradiction.¹⁰¹ It is odd, too, that only after this merciless exploitation "slowly something of the ruthlessness and cynicism of the frontier began to seep into his own thinking."¹⁰² There is no trace of cynicism in his acts or his writings, you understand—it is only in his *thinking*.

In 1842, after years of temple building, Joseph Smith suddenly becomes a Mason and steals all their rites.¹⁰³ Yet the temples do not change their design or their meaning. The founding of an endowment house and a temple at the same time, in 1841, shows, as Meyer observes, that the essence of the temple rites was well established before then.¹⁰⁴ In founding the rites "it is doubtful whether Joseph sensed the truly staggering implications of his endowment system."¹⁰⁵ More than five years before, Elijah himself had brought the keys to this work "lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse," but Joseph failed to realize that it was really a big thing (D&C 110:15). Repeatedly our guide refuses to give Joseph Smith credit for knowing what he was about, in spite of his own emphatic declarations on the subject; she knows that he is really undergoing a slow evolution, stumbling blindly forward from one surprise to the next.

Thus she can give us the glib assurance that "Joseph laid no great emphasis on the temple ordinances,"¹⁰⁶ even though the one consuming interest of his life was temple building. He was simply interested in the "pomp and spectacle"¹⁰⁷ of the temple. Then where are the candles and drapes, the bells, incense, jewels and glass and gold; where the chants and processions, the scarlet and purple; in short, all the legitimate Oriental fixtures of other cults? Where are the old-accepted and sure-fire properties of "pomp and spectacle," Christian and pagan, in every age? Why are the

temples so austere? Where is the "intense color and luxuriant detail"¹⁰⁸ he loved? It is simply another case of the facts stating one thing and Brodie stating another, basing her assertions on her own imponderable knowledge of Joseph's inmost mental processes.

As he approaches the end of his career, "it [is] now easy for him to believeâ€that God had willed [his success]."¹⁰⁹ After what he has been through it is about time. Yes, "Joseph was coming to look upon himself as the key figure in the setting up of a great religious kingdom."¹¹⁰ And what, pray, did he think he was doing all those years during which he was receiving revelations by the dozen, writing the Book of Mormon, building temples, establishing the Church, and whatnot? Was that all just a game with no idea behind it?

Next an Episcopal divine claims that Joseph Smith said a Greek Psalter was really Egyptian.¹¹¹ In the speech in which he gives himself away, Joseph is quoted as saying things such as, "Them characters is like the letters that was engraved on the golden plates." Now Joseph Smith in 1842 never made that remark. The description of the grotesque illiterate is a false one, not merely "exaggerating the imperfections of Joseph's grammar"¹¹² as Brodie claims, but exaggerating to a degree which amounts to pure fabrication. The language is invented (whole volumes of Joseph's own words have survived from this period); the character is totally out of keeping with the Prophet's fine style and grand manner in 1842: it is the picture and the language of another person that the Reverend Caswall does not scruple to invent. Yet this book, published in England, is the only evidence for the story. Since inventing stories about Joseph Smith was a popular parlor game with respectable people, and since Brother Caswall is not

overscrupulous, and is certainly overeager, what value is to be placed on the story at all? It needs corroboration, and Brodie finds such in a most wonderful manner.

When sometime after this most dubiously attested event a really clever trap is set, Joseph does not walk into it. That, for Brodie, proves the Caswall story, for why was Joseph so devilishly clever unless he "had been made cautious by the Greek psalter trick?"¹¹³ This is known as playing with loaded dice—it usually gets a D-minus on a term paper.

Next comes the problem of polygamy. "Paul had said that in heaven there would be no marriage or giving in marriage, but Joseph taught that this would not apply to his Saints"¹¹⁴ (cf. Matthew 22:29—30; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:35). Quite the contrary, it is the literal acceptance of this very doctrine that makes the endowment work on this earth so urgent. It is remarks like the above that betray a complete misunderstanding or willful distortion of the most elementary aspects of Mormonism. They also betray something else: Mrs. Brodie deals lightly with holy writ, for it is not Paul but Jesus to whom the remark is attributed by no fewer than three gospels. To explain the loyalty of sensible women to the institution, Brodie can think of no better line than her old chestnut: the doctrine somehow had great "magnetism."¹¹⁵ In her treatment of the subject her sources are extremely weak. In any city in the United States almost any day of the year young women may be found making vivid, full, circumstantial, and sincere accusations against attackers that are found upon investigation to be nothing more than the objects of their own overwrought desires and imaginings. This does not mean that such accusations are necessarily false, but it does mean that they call for corroboration. And what better corroboration

than the words of John C. Bennett, whom Brodie willingly condemns as untrustworthy—but only after his words have sunk in.

In the matter of Joseph Smith's wives, Mrs. Brodie feels free to pick and choose at will: some of the marriages were entirely spiritual, she freely admits—not all—but some. And by pure inference she can tell us just which were and which were not.¹¹⁶ She never explains why, with his passionate desire for progeny, he had so few children.

By the end of 1843, to fit the evolutionary scheme of things, "Joseph was now fully intoxicated with power and drunk with visions of empire and apocalyptic glory";¹¹⁷ he "by now had become a law unto himself, [with] utter incapacity for contentment with a moderate success."¹¹⁸ Yet this maniac "suffered from no illusions about his chances of winning the supreme political post in the nation";¹¹⁹ his campaign utterances are models of acumen and common sense—"What other voice in all the madness was so sane?" asks Don C. Seitz in his study of the campaign of 1844.¹²⁰ Yet Brodie passes by the speeches and writings of the campaign in perfect silence—they would destroy her smooth curve of evolution.

Still more wonderful, at this time his idea of the kingdom of God on earth becomes "subtly transformed from a *mere symbol* to a thing of substance."¹²¹ Many years before, Brodie entitled her chapter on the affairs of Kirtland "My Kingdom Is of This World";¹²² now she decides that from the beginning the whole thing has been "a mere symbol" without substance.

When Joseph Smith says that the power of truth alone will bring all nations under the gospel, Brodie is good enough to correct him: "This was only partly true. The Legion now numbered almost four thousand men."¹²³ So the leader who had often ordered his own men to desist from conflict and readily admitted defeat when outnumbered, who on the same page is described as realizing that he cannot cope with the violence on the local frontier and will have to emigrate, and who suffered no illusions in things political, this same man believes he can subject all nations with a band of "almost four thousand men"!

For evolution had made him drunk with pride: "Almost never in these days did Joseph step outside himself and look with surprise and humility upon what he had become."¹²⁴ How *does* she know? How can she check up on such a deeply subjective matter? By pure intuition, to be sure. Thus she and she alone can tell us that Joseph's remark, "No man knows my history,"¹²⁵ was delivered "in a wanton moment of self-searching said with a kind of wonder."¹²⁶ Who said so? The reader who has plunked down four dollars has a right to expect something better than proof that is always found to rest on nothing but the woman's instincts.

When the *Expositor* wrote, "We will not acknowledge any man as king or lawgiver to the church,"¹²⁷ it was repeating a hackneyed Fourth of July phrase. Yet Brodie sees in this "an unmistakable allusion to Joseph's kingship,"¹²⁸ for which virtually no other evidence exists. If he actually was acclaimed king, why doesn't the *Expositor* say so? Why does it attack his kingship by a perfectly familiar figure of speech and then say no more?

The culmination of Joseph's megalomania finds him without courage, "empty of conviction when he needed it most."¹²⁹ Again

we search for the little birdie that tells little Brodie these things. "He stood proudly before his men, betraying nothing of the tumult and anxiety racking him within."¹³⁰ Since he betrayed nothing by look, word, or gesture of his inner feelings, we take the liberty to report that he was really thinking of a fishing trip made on his seventh birthday; there is no evidence for this, but of course his thoughts were *perfectly* concealed, you know. Is this history? To present as facts what a man might have or could have or even possibly would have been thinking on an occasion when, far from revealing his thoughts, he covers them up, is a good game; but a book built up of alternate layers of psychological speculation and haphazard sources that only support them if accepted with a certain peculiar interpretation—such a book is not history.

In all her account of the evolution of things, Brodie never once mentions the true name of the Church, though great importance has always been placed upon it by the Mormons. For if she lets out that the Church received its long title by revelation in 1838, her picture of endless and dubious gropings suffers an eclipse. The name describes a very specific thing and implies an unvarying and uncompromising program. It is the undeviating and unshakable firmness of the Prophet in following a single line that Meyer, our learned control, finds "so astounding," and that makes the survival of the Church in his opinion "well-nigh incomprehensible" in view of its rigid and inflexible stand. For him the whole significance of Mormonism in world history lies in the fact that it is one of a few "revealed religions" (*Offenbarungsreligion*), like primitive Christianity and Islam, and is not essentially the product of evolution or study.¹³¹ Brodie has missed this basic point entirely. She does not even seem to be aware of the fact that there are such religions, and that they have

nothing in common with the run-of-the-mill cults of the sectarians and scholastics.

When Brodie Holds Her Peace

Once you have explained Joseph Smith by the safe conventional rules-of-thumb (1) that he was neither as good nor as bad as he has been painted, and (2) that his whole career followed a perfectly natural course of evolution, you still have to explain his success. This Mrs. Brodie attempts to do by demonstrating (1) that Joseph Smith had a great personal "magnetic" appeal,¹³² (2) that his teaching was a product of New England and "smelled of the frontier,"¹³³ (3) that it was pleasingly materialistic and emphasized worldly prosperity,¹³⁴ and (4) that it was a "potpourri" of everything.¹³⁵

The first three of these arguments break down completely in consideration of the fact that the Church derived its numbers and its strength largely from European converts who had never set eyes on Joseph Smith, who were far removed from the Yankee tradition, and to whom the frontier was a foreign and a hostile thing (incidentally, the Church was never very popular in New England, and it was detested on the frontier). Moreover, the materialistic appeal was all against joining the Church in their case. Brodie must rest her whole case here on the economic urge, and she becomes frankly deceptive in speaking of "phenomenal conversions among the poverty-ridden English workers."¹³⁶ She assumes they were poverty-ridden because George A. Smith describes great poverty in England, yet the one source she cites specifically states, "its converts are not made from the lowest ranks [but] are mechanics and tradesmen who have saved a little money."¹³⁷ The economic appeal, even in the Church paper, was

that offered by America, not the Church. These people all paid their own way: it was quite possible for them to go to America without complicating matters and ruining their economic outlook by becoming Mormons.

But why argue? The proof lies to hand—and Brodie has passed it by in tiptoe silence. We refer to the journals and reminiscences of the converts themselves. These were not written for publication and are often very frank; the writers have not the slightest reason for concealing their interests and motives, and if they did not know their own strong minds, it is not likely that anyone else ever will. Almost without exception they tell the same story: joining the Church meant loss of economic security and social status, one became a pariah of the worst sort; there were impassioned scenes in the family and brickbats in the streets. The prospect in America was not brilliant—they looked forward only to hardships and privations in the new land. If one wanted to go to America to improve one's fortune, there were certainly better ways of doing it than making enemies of all the world. Of all this, not a word in Brodie—only the insinuation that the people joined up to get rich.

If the personality, American background, and materialism of Joseph Smith do not explain his success, it must lie in the secret of the "theology";¹³⁸ namely, that it was "a patchwork of ideas and rituals drawn from every quarter."¹³⁹ To her this is a mark of degeneracy, and she neglects to mention Joseph Smith's frequent declaration that he gladly accepts truth from any and all sources—for it must appear that Brodie has made a great discovery.

Now there is no such thing as a completely original religion, and every religion, including Christianity, is full of things that may be found elsewhere. If Joseph Smith thought of the sky as being blue,

so did the ancient Chinese. It is no condemnation of the teachings of Jesus that, as Justin Martyr demonstrates at great length, they may also be found in the philosophers.¹⁴⁰ But the mere throwing together of a "potpourri" of everything does not make a doctrine. In this regard we must point to another remarkable, perhaps the most remarkable, feature of Mormonism, which our authority has completely neglected to mention.

Experience has shown that no religious body, from the smallest country congregation to the church of Rome itself, can subsist for long without finding itself under the necessity of interpreting the scriptures. The result is the "History of Dogma." But the Mormons have no History of Dogma. There has never been a Mormon scholar. Learned men in various fields have been Mormons, but there are no experts on matters of doctrine; there has never been a council or synod to alter or even discuss any matter of doctrine.

If Joseph Smith were to walk into a conference of the Mormon Church today he would find himself completely at home; and if he were to address the congregation they would never for a moment detect anything the least bit strange, unfamiliar, or old-fashioned in his teaching. Yet for all this incredible doctrinal stability, the Mormons have been of all people the least disposed to fight change—no one insists more emphatically on their passion for progress than Brodie herself. Moreover, the Saints have always had more than their share of crackpots, and these have always been given a hearing. Yet of all churches in the world, only this one has not found it necessary to readjust any part of its doctrine in the last hundred years.

If we are to believe Mrs. Brodie, it was the shrewdness and agility of Joseph's "highly compensatedâ€sincerity,"¹⁴¹ plus a great "magnetic"¹⁴² appeal, that induced people to swallow his doctrine as he held them spellbound from the pulpit; and when "his magnetic presence"¹⁴³ left the pulpit even for a moment, it "left a void that they had found intolerable."¹⁴⁴ What, then, would be the first result of his death? Doctrinal chaos, of course. Why didn't the whole thing explode? Was it because Joseph Smith had left a legacy of written revelation? But every page of scripture is just so much more grist for controversy. Were people indifferent to matters of doctrine? Not when they would go forth by the thousands as unpaid preachers. The fact that everyone has a share in Church work, though it makes for loyalty, should only lead to doctrinal confusion. Let it be borne in mind that the Mormons regard the heavens as still open, and every man and woman eligible to receive inspiration. How does Brodie explain the fact that the doctrine she claims was the haphazard outgrowth of complete opportunism remains the most stable on earth? She doesn't.

What Eduard Meyer sees in the Mormon doctrine is before everything else *Konsequenz* (consistency; to use his own words, that doctrine is "absolutely literal, sober, and logical"; *verstandesgemäss*). Moreover, says Meyer, the scientific aspects of the dogma, "in full agreement with the later discoveries of science," may well be a cause of considerable gratification to believers.¹⁴⁵ These impressive aspects of doctrine mean nothing to the glib and superficial mind of the modern English major, the copy-desk mind with its inevitable leaning towards journalism, and its buoyant faith in accomplishing all things by the mere manipulation of words. Brodie's silences are an eloquent commentary on the shallow thinking of the times.¹⁴⁶

The Art of Insinuation as Illustrated by a Few

Succinct Examples from a Highly Reliable Source

In 1835, Joseph Smith reports having given a brief sketch of his early life, including the first vision, to Erastus Holmes. Brodie objects: "But Joseph admittedly did not begin writing his history until 1838."¹⁴⁷ We are to assume that the report must be a mistake. Only Joseph Smith is talking about a brief informal sketch, while Brodie is talking about the formal Church history, an entirely different thing. She insinuates that they are the same thing and that the Prophet is lying.¹⁴⁸

The Moundbuilders actually resemble the Book of Mormon people not at all.¹⁴⁹ Who said they did? The Book of Mormon tells of a people ages removed from the Moundbuilders and very far away. Yet Brodie insinuates that because the Moundbuilders (of all people) do not resemble the Nephites, the Book of Mormon is a fraud.

One of Brodie's favorite insinuations is that Joseph Smith was a charlatan because he constantly used the language of the King James Bible, including whole passages from the ancient scriptures, in modern revelations.¹⁵⁰ That is the equivalent of accusing an author of stealing words from the dictionary. Jesus and the disciples constantly spoke the language of the prophets, not in the original, but in the religious idiom of their own time and place. Just so, the prophets themselves quote from the Psalms and the Mosaic Law. Now the religious idiom of the West was the language of the King James Bible; that was and still is the standard of "formal" English for great occasions. If Joseph Smith had been living in Germany he would not have used the King

James Version at all—he would have spoken Luther's German, but that would not prove him a hoax and a plagiarist. Of course Brodie knows this, but she repeatedly insinuates that the use of Bible language by Joseph Smith implies fraud.

"Foot-washing was practiced regularly on the Western Reserve."¹⁵¹ So what? What if it was practiced in Tierra del Fuego? Anyone can read about it in the New Testament.

Confronted with the testimony of the eight witnesses, the lady neatly turns it aside with a witticism of Mark Twain regarding the prominence of the Whitmer family in the list.¹⁵² But if all the eight had been named John Jones, the document still remains to be explained.

Brodie tells a perfectly fictitious story of an attempt by Joseph Smith to walk on the water, but dismisses it with the remark, "Baseless though this story may be, it is none the less symbolic."¹⁵³ The reader is told that though no justification exists for believing the story, Joseph Smith must always have been doing silly things like that, and that makes it "symbolic." Why bother with mere symbols? Why not give the concrete examples? Can she do no better than to cite a tale that is *known to be false* simply because it symbolizes her idea of Joseph Smith?

"Very early the young prophet learned to use persecution as a means of identifying himself with the great martyrs."¹⁵⁴ Now the first thing any Christian thinks of upon being persecuted for his religion, the thing in fact which the Bible enjoins us to think of, is the assurance, "blessed are ye, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matthew 5:11—12). Yet in

Joseph Smith's case this natural and Christian reaction is evidence to Brodie of a singular vanity and shallowness.

The case of Grandison Newell against the Prophet is given at length: then "when the court convenedâ€”it was clear that he had no case."¹⁵⁵ In the meantime, however, we are left with the impression that Joseph Smith was somewhat of a rascal.¹⁵⁶ In the same way, John C. Bennett's lurid description of the "Danites and 'Angels'" appears at length.¹⁵⁷ Later it turns out that Bennett is an "unreliable [witness], to say the least,"¹⁵⁸ but meantime it has all sunk in and the reader is left with a definite impression that the charges may well be true. This is a favorite trick of Brodie's, giving worthless but quite damning evidence at length just for effect, and then refuting or qualifying the testimonies in a single brief sentence.

The Brodie evolutionary theory rests heavily on the word "now." If it is written, "he now refused to beat his wife," or "he now ate eggs for breakfast," one naturally assumes that the subject formerly did beat his wife in the one case, and in the other, that he formerly did not eat eggs for breakfast. That is what the words insinuate, but it is not what they say: actually the man may never have beaten his wife and always had eggs for breakfast. Mrs. Brodie introduces every selected key event in the life of Joseph Smith with a "now" of this sort, making it appear in each case that the thing was occurring for the first time; for this she has no proof, of course, but the little "now" enables her to build up his career step by step the way she wants it.

Super-Psychology

Mrs. Brodie applauds the honesty of Josiah Quincy's conclusion: "If the reader does not know just what to make of Joseph Smith, I cannot help him out of the difficulty. I myself stand helpless before the puzzle."¹⁵⁹ But not Brodie! On no other evidence than Quincy's own, she tells us what he should have seen but failed to. When Quincy reports that Joseph Smith joked with him about the ridiculous figure he must sometimes cut in the eyes of unbelievers, he simply notes that the Prophet has the sense to acknowledge the humor of the situation (a risk no false prophet would take). This interpretation will never do for Brodie; let Josiah look again: is it not plain that Joseph is expressing a "[mood] of uncertainty and doubt?"¹⁶⁰ Likewise when he says, "I do not think there have been many good men on the earth since the days of Adam— I do not want you to think I am very righteous, for I am not,"¹⁶¹ he is not just speaking plain truths, he is confessing that he has grave doubts as to his calling.¹⁶²

In dealing with Emma, our author allows free rein to her woman's intuition. One day Joseph was bantering his wife while she was setting the table; Parley Pratt was present, and everybody was jolly.¹⁶³ Pratt asks Joseph why he does not eat alone like Napoleon, and Emma observes that he is greater than Napoleon, whereupon Joseph congratulates her on the wisest utterance of her lifetime. It is all very merry and typical—Brodie often points out that Joseph Smith was a great hand for joking about everything—yet she does not hesitate to see in this episode a clear revelation "of the prophet's vanity."¹⁶⁴

When Joseph Smith faced Emma for the last time, "he knew that she thought him a coward."¹⁶⁵ So Brodie knows that Emma knew that Joseph knew what Emma thought! Is this history? There might be some merit in this sort of thing if, like the invented

speeches of the Greek historian, it took some skill to produce. But, if anything, it is hard for the historian to avoid the pitfalls of such cheap and easy psychology. The business of the historian is to tell what happened, not what someone might have been thinking about what was happening.¹⁶⁶ Does it take any skill or knowledge at all to write that "the Book of Mormon must have been a source of secret worry,"¹⁶⁷ or "Mormon ritual doubtless had its roots in the same unconscious drives that led the prophet into polygamy,"¹⁶⁸ or to appeal continually to a secret imponderable quality known as "magnetism?"¹⁶⁹

At the end of the book in which she has leaned so heavily on the categorical "must have," our author displays an equal virtuosity with the categorical "would have." She tells us without a moment's hesitation just what would have happened if the Prophet had not been killed: the Saints "would have" followed him West, he "would have" lost some converts, his empire "would" have been more colorful than Brigham Young's; Emma "Would have" followed him, and the Gentiles "would not have" been able to rejoice in her second marriage.¹⁷⁰ This is history in the Brodie tradition. The young woman who can tell us with perfect confidence just what must have happened and what would have happened is not one to be stopped by uncooperative documents and recalcitrant sources; and she is most at home when there are no documents at all.

A Solid Contribution

If anyone has a right to reject Joseph Smith's own story, it is also anybody's right to ask the skeptic for a more plausible version of what happened. Such a version Fawn Brodie has bravely attempted to produce. She tells the plausible enough story of a guy

named Joe, who walks and talks and laughs and looks just like Joseph Smith. Only there the resemblance ends. We know a butcher who looks just like the great Johann Sebastian Bach, and he walks and talks and eats and breathes—the very things that Bach did—only there is one slight difference: the butcher can't write music. Brodie's Joseph is a real enough character—all the details are there, except one: he can't do the things Joseph Smith did—the only things about Joseph Smith, incidentally, that really interest us.

Brodie's Joseph is decidedly not the man who produced the Book of Mormon; for the former is wildly imaginative, undisciplined, lazy, and short-sighted, while the Book of Mormon is the work (even if you take it as fiction) of an exceedingly sober, self-controlled, incredibly industrious, and well-organized brain.

Brodie's Joseph picks up ideas like a thieving magpie, throws them together haphazardly, and sells them from the pulpit. He is therefore *not* the man whose teachings are so well-knit and perfectly logical that they have never had to undergo the slightest change or alteration during a century in which every other church in Christendom has continually revamped its doctrines.

Brodie's Joseph is the man who works by personal magnetism and dispenses his far-fetched and jumbled ideas by rhetorical legerdemain. This is *not* the Joseph who won his following among the artisans and farmers of Great Britain, Scandinavia, and Switzerland—a finely disciplined, hard-headed, and Bible-bred generation which was looking for light but not interested in vaudeville or voodoo.

Brodie's Joseph appealed to the Yankee and the frontier minds. The real Joseph was suspected by the one and hated by the other and enjoyed his great success in distant lands and on the islands of the sea. Incidentally, no effort of the imagination can fit these islanders, or Europeans, for that matter, into the contemporary American scene.

Brodie's Joseph announces, "My kingdom is of this world." The real Joseph describes this world as one whose "substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great" (D&C 1:16), and he tells how "the hour is not yet, but is nigh at hand, when peace shall be taken from the earth, and the devil shall have power over his own dominion" (D&C 1:35). Joseph Smith's message was before everything one of warning, of clear specific warnings against the very things that are transpiring in our day. No man ever sized up "this world" better than he.

Brodie's Joseph is not the man who organized the Church. That man always knew exactly what he was doing. Brodie's Joseph never does. That man, from the first, sent out messengers with messages so crystal clear, so specific, and so unequivocal that they either convinced on the spot or excited paroxysms of rage. There was nothing hazy in what these men had to say, nor in the church they represented. Brodie's Joseph lives and dies in a fog.

Brodie's Joseph never had the plates. The Joseph the witnesses talk about *did* have them; and as long as Mrs. Brodie refuses to face the witnesses, her Joseph cannot turn the real one out of doors.

Brodie's Joseph, rioting with his fifty wives, is not the man whose conception of marriage so completely escapes her. Emma Smith and Eliza Snow were not acquainted with the oversexed rake that Mrs. Brodie knows so well.

Brodie's Joseph, the crazy fool who is "simply drunk" with dreams of power and personal glory, has nothing in common with the Joseph Smith whose pronouncements in the campaign of 1844 (still there for all to read) are models of wisdom and statesmanship that have excited the unqualified admiration of experts. Brodie as good as tells us that the Joseph Smith that Josiah Quincy saw and admired is not the Joseph *she* has in mind.

So we could go on, distinguishing between the two Josephs. That is just a way of answering the question we set at the beginning: does Mrs. Brodie go too far? "Too far" is putting it mildly. The book is nothing but a mass of strained interpretations and limiting explanations, mostly in terms of a highly intimate and intuitive psychology. It would take more than the impressive padding of an appendix to support so much manipulating, unless the new and wonderful documents thus brought to light should turn out to be not merely rare but actually to have something to say.¹⁷¹ Like a buyer of first editions, Mrs. Brodie is dazzled enough by the mere rarity of her finds to overlook the fact that they tell us absolutely nothing that was not known before.

Still and all, the good woman's contribution is a real one. She has set about to answer the question: "How can you explain Joseph Smith if you reject his own story?" The result is surprising: time and again the discriminating reader asks in wonderment, "Can't the dear woman do better than this?" Must it always be "would have" and "must have" and fourth-dimensional psychology and

"Mormonism Unveiled" and reading between the lines of vindictive but ambiguous newspaper articles? If we ever had doubts about the real Joseph Smith, Brodie's struggles have dispelled them. The question is no longer "How can the world explain Joseph Smith?" but "Can the world explain him at all?" And Brodie gives us the answer: It can't. It thinks Brodie has done the trick and hails her with a prize: Nothing could more clearly reveal its own sad lack of resources or its pathetic eagerness to find some sort of explanation for Joseph Smith than this acclaim of such a poor effort to make seminar rhetoric sound like history.

All his life, Augustine, the father of medieval and modern Christianity, wrestled mightily with the problem of working out a doctrine that would satisfy both reason and faith. Both Grabmann and Gilson bear witness to the inadequacy of his solution, the former noting the saint's failure to answer any of the basic questions which it is ostensibly the purpose of the gospel to answer,¹⁷² and the latter pointing out the "undefined" and "vulnerable" nature of the answers he does give.¹⁷³ It remained for later ages to try to hammer out a complete and convincing statement of doctrine, and they have had no easy time of it. A long line of canons and decrees attests alike the determination and the failure of the learned divines to give the Christian doctrine a definitive and final form, from which we conclude that it is one thing for the sweating revivalist to fling out his ecstatic pronouncements as they come to him in hot and frenzied disorder, and a very different thing to give logical and consistent form to those ideas.

The gospel as the Mormons know it sprang full-grown from the words of Joseph Smith. It has never been worked over or touched up in any way and is free of revisions and alterations. Joseph

Smith took the same elements that have proven so recalcitrant and so hopelessly conflicting in the hands of the churchmen and threw them together, with an awful lot of other stuff (to follow Brodie) into a single wildly chaotic mess. And lo and behold, everything fell into line of its own accord; all the haphazard elements in the bewildering heap fitted together perfectly to form a doctrine so commanding that not even a hint of rhetorical paradox is needed to support it, and no "Gregorian compromise" with a pleasure-loving world has been necessary to assure its vigorous growth.

The merciless logic of the Mormon doctrine made its strictly amateur missionaries from the outset the bane of the learned cloth throughout the world. What a piece of luck for Joseph! How her chuckle-headed, pipe-dreaming, glory-mongering hero ever produced a doctrine more wholly logical than anything done by a St. Thomas or a Calvin and at the same time as vivid and intimate as the faith of the Primitive Church is one of the more important issues our Sibyl has avoided. Certainly her Joseph is not up to the task, and until a more likely candidate than the Brodie mannequin turns up, we will just have to accept Joseph Smith's own story of what happened.

This was originally published in pamphlet form in Salt Lake City by Bookcraft in 1946 and was subsequently reissued with minor changes at various times.

Notes

1. See for example, nn. 111 and 166 below.
2. This preface appeared in Hugh W. Nibley, *No Ma'am, That's Not History*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960), 5.

3. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History* (New York: Knopf, 1945). A second revised and enlarged edition was published by Knopf in 1971. Through page 404, these editions are very similar, and page numbers may refer to either edition, except where otherwise noted.

4. Ibid., viii.

5. [Cf. Fawn M. Brodie's 1975 statement: "I was convinced before I ever began writing the book that Joseph Smith was not a true prophet," in "Biography of Fawn McKay Brodie," interview with Shirley E. Stephenson, 30 November 1975, Oral History Collection, Fullerton State University, Fullerton, CA, p. 10.]

6. Ibid., 18.

7. Ibid., 19.

8. Ibid., 331.

9. Ibid., 19.

10. Ibid., 31.

11. Ibid., 37.

12. Ibid., 80.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., 84.

15. Ibid., 46.

[16.](#) Ibid., 47.

[17.](#) Ibid.

[18.](#) Karl Joel, *Wandlungen der Weltanschauung: Eine Philosophiegeschichte als Geschichtsphilosophie*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1928—34).

[19.](#) Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 71.

[20.](#) Ibid., 70.

[21.](#) Thomas Dick, *The Philosophy of a Future State* (Brookfield, MA: Merriam, 1829). [Cf. *Latter-Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 2 (December 1836): 423—25; 3 (February 1837): 461—63; and 3 (March 1837): 468—69; cf. also Edward T. Jones, "The Theology of Thomas Dick and Its Possible Relationship to That of Joseph Smith," Master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1969.]

[22.](#) Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 171.

[23.](#) Ibid., 172.

[24.](#) Ibid., 196.

[25.](#) Ibid., 213.

[26.](#) Ibid., 214.

[27.](#) Ibid., 65.

[28.](#) Ibid., 281.

- [29.](#) Eduard Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. in 5 parts (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1909—37).
- [30.](#) Eduard Meyer, *Ursprung und Geschichte der Mormonen* (Halle: Neimeyer, 1912), 142, n. 2; English translation by Heinz F. Rahde and Eugene Seach, in *The Origin and History of the Mormons* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1961), 102, n. 3.
- [31.](#) Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 256. This has been deleted from the second edition.
- [32.](#) Meyer, *Ursprung und Geschichte der Mornionen*, 2; Rahde and Seach *Origin and History of the Mormons*, 3.
- [33.](#) Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, vii.
- [34.](#) Ibid., 22.
- [35.](#) Ibid., 14.
- [36.](#) Ibid., 23.
- [37.](#) HC 1:7.
- [38.](#) Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 23. What has been emphasized in the first edition has been deleted from the second edition.
- [39.](#) Ibid.
- [40.](#) Ibid., 24.

[41.](#) Ibid., 25.

[42.](#) [Cf. Hugh W. Nibley, *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967), 96—126; reprinted in *CWHN* 7:84—110.]

[43.](#) Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 25. This quotation is from the first edition; the second edition says "after 1830."

[44.](#) Ibid.

[45.](#) Ibid., 16. This becomes "religious independence of his father" in the second edition.

[46.](#) Ibid.

[47.](#) Ibid., 24. This was deleted from the second edition.

[48.](#) Ibid., 26.

[49.](#) Ibid., 38 (emphasis added).

[50.](#) Ibid., 41.

[51.](#) Ibid., 49.

[52.](#) Ibid., 53.

[53.](#) Ibid., 84.

[54.](#) Ibid., 27.

[55.](#) Ibid.

[56.](#) Ibid., 53—54.

[57.](#) Ibid., 53.

[58.](#) Ibid., 27.

[59.](#) Ibid., 63; Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (Avon, CT: Heritage, 1972), 82.

[60.](#) Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 55.

[61.](#) Ibid., 83.

[62.](#) Ibid., 38. The author quotes the Palmyra *Reflector*.

[63.](#) Ibid., 42.

[64.](#) Ibid., 37, 41, 53.

[65.](#) Ibid., 72.

[66.](#) Ibid., 34—36.

[67.](#) Ibid., 99.

[68.](#) Ibid., 80.

[69.](#) Ibid., 84.

[70.](#) Meyer, *Ursprung und Geschichte der Mormonen*, 16—18, 81—83.

[71.](#) Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 84.

- [72.](#) Ibid., 85.
- [73.](#) Ibid., 100.
- [74.](#) Ibid., 84.
- [75.](#) Ibid.
- [76.](#) Ibid., 69.
- [77.](#) Ibid., 86 (emphasis added).
- [78.](#) Ibid., 14.
- [79.](#) Ibid., 91.
- [80.](#) Ibid., 403 (emphasis added).
- [81.](#) Ibid., 91—92.
- [82.](#) Ibid., 87.
- [83.](#) Ibid., 118.
- [84.](#) Ibid., 123.
- [85.](#) Ibid., 128 (emphasis added).
- [86.](#) Ibid., 138.
- [87.](#) Ibid.
- [88.](#) Ibid., 140.

[89.](#) Ibid., 159.

[90.](#) Ibid., 168.

[91.](#) Ibid., 169.

[92.](#) Ibid., 168.

[93.](#) Ibid., 169 (emphasis added).

[94.](#) Ibid., 69.

[95.](#) Ibid., 171.

[96.](#) Ibid., 107.

[97.](#) Ibid.

[98.](#) Ibid., 174.

[99.](#) Hermann Kees, *Ägypten* (Munich: Beck, 1933), 282; [cf. Hugh W. Nibley's series of articles, "A Look at the Pearl of Great Price," *Ensign* (1968—70).]

[100.](#) Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 210.

[101.](#) Ibid.

[102.](#) Ibid., 211.

[103.](#) Ibid., 280.

[104.](#) Meyer, *Ursprung und Geschichte der Mormonen*, 166—67; cf. Rahde and Seach, *Origin and History of the Mormons*, 121—22.

[105.](#) Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 282—83.

[106.](#) Ibid., 283.

[107.](#) Ibid.

[108.](#) Ibid., 275.

[109.](#) Ibid., 285.

[110.](#) Ibid., 286.

[111.](#) This writer has pointed out that the Reverend Caswall published not only one but no fewer than six conflicting versions of his famous interview with Joseph Smith. It is a moot question whether it is more reprehensible for a biographer to be ignorant of such a vital and readily accessible fact as this, or to conceal it if he knows of it. Mrs. Brodie cites as her source for the story Caswall's earliest version, that of 1842, while the tale she actually tells is the elaborately revamped version of 1851, to which she adds important touches of her own not to be found in any of Caswall's accounts. A little of her vaunted "primary research" could have shown Mrs. Brodie that while Caswall's Psalter trick was carefully prepared in advance, the interview with the Prophet never took place. Cf. Henry Caswall, *The City of the Mormons; or, Three Days at Nauvoo in 1842* (London: Rivingtons, 1842), Henry Caswall, *America, and the American Church* (London: Mozleys, 1851), 358—59. Cf. also Hugh W. Nibley, *The Myth Makers* (Salt

Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961), 194—287, reprinted in this volume, pages 103—406.

[112.](#) Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 290.

[113.](#) Ibid., 291.

[114.](#) Ibid., 299.

[115.](#) Ibid., 304.

[116.](#) Ibid., 338.

[117.](#) Ibid., 354.

[118.](#) Ibid., 356.

[119.](#) Ibid., 362.

[120.](#) Don C. Seitz, *Uncommon Americans* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1925), 13.

[121.](#) Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 356 (emphasis added).

[122.](#) Ibid., 181.

[123.](#) Ibid., 357.

[124.](#) Ibid., 366.

[125.](#) Ibid.

[126.](#) Ibid.

- [127.](#) Ibid., 375, citing Nauvoo *Expositor*, 7 June 1844.
- [128.](#) Ibid.
- [129.](#) Ibid., 376.
- [130.](#) Ibid., 378.
- [131.](#) Meyer, *Ursprung und Geschichte der Mormonen*, 1; cf. Rahde and Seach, *Origin and History of the Mormons*, 1.
- [132.](#) Cf. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 73, 86, 210.
- [133.](#) Ibid., 187.
- [134.](#) Ibid., 402.
- [135.](#) Ibid., 70.
- [136.](#) Ibid., 212.
- [137.](#) Ibid., 264—65.
- [138.](#) Ibid., 403.
- [139.](#) Ibid.
- [140.](#) Justin Martyr, *Apology II*, 8, in *PG* 6:457; cf. *ibid.*, 1, 59, in *PG* 6:416; and Justin Martyr, *Cohortatio ad Graecos* 32, in *PG* 6:300.
- [141.](#) Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 85.

[142.](#) Ibid., 73.

[143.](#) Ibid., 210.

[144.](#) Ibid.

[145.](#) Meyer, *Ursprung und Geschichte der Mormonen*, 156—58; cf. Rahde and Seach, *Origin and History of the Mormons*, 113—15.

[146.](#) Since Mrs. Brodie's book appeared, a number of studies by non-Mormon writers (Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1950]; David B. Davis, "The New England Origins of Mormonism," *New England Quarterly* 26 [June 1953]: 147—68; and W. H. G. Armytage, "Liverpool, Gateway to Zion," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 48 [April 1957]: 39—44, for example) have shown that Mormonism was definitely not a product either of the American Frontier or of the revival meeting. Thus, two of Mrs. Brodie's basic assumptions, on which she counts heavily to explain her peculiar view of Joseph Smith and his work, have been discredited. See Hugh W. Nibley, "What Frontier, What Camp Meeting?" *IE* 62 (August 1959): 590—91; reprinted in *CWHN* 8:182—92.

[147.](#) Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 24. This is in the first edition only.

[148.](#) Ibid. This was deleted from the second edition. See footnote in first edition marked with an asterisk.

[149.](#) Ibid., 36.

[150.](#) [Cf. Hugh W. Nibley, "Literary Style Used in Book of Mormon Insured Accurate Translation," in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, vol. 8 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1989), 212—18.]

[151.](#) Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 176.

[152.](#) Ibid., 79, Twain, *Roughing It*, 84.

[153.](#) Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 84.

[154.](#) Ibid., 88.

[155.](#) Ibid., 203.

[156.](#) [Cf. Marvin S. Hill, C. Keith Rooker, and Larry T. Wimmer, *The Kirtland Economy Revisited* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1977), 51. The authors present a detailed quantitative analysis of the Kirtland Safety Society issue which is critical of Brodie's conclusions; cf. 3, 16, 24, 59, 69.]

[157.](#) Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 315.

[158.](#) Ibid., 331.

[159.](#) Ibid., 294: Josiah Quincy, "Joseph Smith at Nauvoo," in *Figures from the Past* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1892), 400.

[160.](#) Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 295.

[161.](#) *HC* 5:401.

[162.](#) Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 296.

163. It was not Parley P. Pratt; of course, it was W. W. Phelps. Cf. *HC* 6:165—66.

164. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 326.

165. *Ibid.*, 384.

166. Note on mind-reading: The eminent American biographer Douglas S. Freeman is reported to have said that he knew where General Lee was and what he was doing "every minute of the Civil War," but that he "wouldn't dare presume what he was thinking" at any time. Mrs. Brodie's principles of research are the exact reverse: though ever so vague as to where the Prophet is or what he is doing, she is never at a loss to tell us exactly what is going on in his mind. "For the popular, novelized biography full of glib insights into the inner man," says Freeman's reviewer, "Freeman has nothing but contempt"; see review of Douglas S. Freeman, see heading *George Washington* in "The Virginians," *Time* 52 (18 October 1948): 108. To this day it remains unclear whether Mrs. Brodie intended a serious biography or a novel.

167. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 275.

168. *Ibid.*, 279.

169. *Ibid.*, 73, 86, 210.

170. *Ibid.*, 398—99.

171. Careful search reveals that Mrs. Brodie has not made a single new documentary find!

[172.](#) Martin Grabmann, *Geschichte der scholastischen Methode*, 2 vols. (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1957).

[173.](#) Etienne Gilson, "The Future of Augustinian Metaphysics," in *A Gilson Reader* (Garden City, NY: Hanover, 1957), 85, 90.

A Note on F. M. Brodie

Almost thirty years ago, Mrs. F. M. Brodie wrote what purported to be a biography of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

It was instantly proclaimed to be the one definitive, authoritative book on Joseph Smith and the Mormons. Reviewers vied in heaping praises on it. Schools and libraries accepted it as the true and official account of Mormonism. Ministers and priests went into ecstasies about it and invariably placed it in the hands of any of their flock who wondered about the Mormons.

Mrs. Brodie went on to produce other biographies, receiving mostly favorable but not enthusiastic reviews but nothing like the attention and acclaim accorded the Joseph Smith epic.

Then she wrote a long biography of Thomas Jefferson, and promptly the roof fell in. "Two vast things" wrote an eminent reviewer, "make this book a prodigy—the author's industry, and her ignorance— She regularly treats us to sub-freshman absurdity— Error on this scale, and in this detail, does not come easily. There is a skill involved. And much nerve— As usual, Ms. Brodie has her facts wrong, even before she loads them with unsustainable surmise."¹ Can this be the same Mrs. B. who wrote about Joseph Smith; is it her vaunted scholarship of which we now read, "the same appetites can be more readily gratified by

those Hollywood fan magazines, with their wealth of unfounded conjecture on the sex lives of others, from which Ms. Brodie has borrowed her scholarly methods"?²

It is the same Brodie. With one important difference. Now, at last, she is writing about a man whose life and character is the close concern of many students and some eminent scholars.

When she writes about Richard Burton, who is going to bother to check up on her? Does it really make that much difference just what kind of a man he was? Is it anybody's intimate personal concern? Even when she writes about Thaddeus Stevens she is on safe grounds—few are they who love or remember him, or care about him at this distance.

She could proceed with the most slapdash methods on such neutral ground, having once established her status by her first mighty opus, which was a *sure thing*. For in that she ran not the slightest danger of offending anybody but the Mormons; she told everybody exactly what they *wanted* to hear about Joseph Smith. Her huge bibliography was accepted at its face value, and awarded her prize after prize.

Those of us who presumed to point out her foibles are still denounced as "flippant." But it needs no profound learning to detect crude and persistent cheating—and that was obvious.

It took this venture into the biography of a man who really interests people, and who is really liked by them, to show the Brodie method for what it is. "One can only be so intricately wrong by deep study and long effort, enough to make Ms. Brodie the fasting hermit and very saint of ignorance. The result has an

erie perfection, as if all the world's greatest builders had agreed to rear, with infinite skill, the world's ugliest building."³

Exactly the same charges which we brought against the Brodie method in 1946, with scandalized hushings from the intellectuals, are now brought against her later and with riper effort by the most respected scholars. As her students at the University of Utah reported, the lady was all out to "get" Joseph Smith, and her motivation was betrayed on many occasions. But with nothing against Thomas Jefferson, she gives him exactly the same treatment. Her manipulating and tangling of evidence, which we once compared to a nest of garter snakes, is now as vividly described in Mr. Wills' illustration of what he calls "the garbled mess she has made of things."⁴

He comments, as we did, on her gross ignorance of the larger background of the subject she was treating, on her manipulation of words ("she constantly finds double meanings"),⁵ and on her obsession with sex ("Ms. Brodie delights in the small titillation of finding sexual references wherever possible").⁶

Were we flippant? No more than this: "It seems a shame to deprive her of such innocent fun; but the game becomes tedious to anyone who has not got her endless appetite for it [sex]."⁷ "Guilt, torment, and conflict are interlineated through all his writings to make his soul quiver in tune with la Brodie's. Yet there is no scrap of evidence for this passion."⁸ It was just the same with Joseph Smith—"la Brodie" could look right into his soul with her Freudian intuition: "Ms. Brodie proves that the attempt to construct one [picture of Jefferson] more to the liking of today's romantic daydreamers involves heroic feats of misunderstanding and constant labor at ignorance."⁹

No one listened when we protested the unfairness of Mrs. B.'s sly and constant insinuations. But now Mr. W. writes: "Typical of Ms. Brodie's hint-and-run method [flippant again] [is] to ask a rhetorical question, and then proceed on the assumption that it has been settled in her favor, making the first surmise a basis for second and third ones, in a towering rickety structure of unsupported conjecture."¹⁰ We called this the "House-That-Jack-Built" method, a great favorite of all anti-Mormon writers.¹¹

These brief comments on reviews of Fawn Brodie's Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History (New York: Norton, 1974) were written around 1974 and presented as a talk.

Notes

[1.](#) Gary Wills, "Uncle Thomas's Cabin," *New York Review of Books* 21 (18 April 1974): 26—27.

[2.](#) *Ibid.*, 28.

[3.](#) *Ibid.*, 26.

[4.](#) *Ibid.*

[5.](#) *Ibid.*

[6.](#) *Ibid.*

[7.](#) *Ibid.*

[8.](#) *Ibid.*, 27.

[9.](#) *Ibid.*, 28.

[10.](#) Ibid., 26.

[11.](#) Hugh W. Nibley, *Sounding Brass* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961), 81—85; reprinted in this volume, pages 407—727.