

Mormonism's First Bad Girl: Lucy Harris and the Gendering of Faith and Doubt in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Quincy D. Newell and Sara M. Patterson

In a ground-breaking 1974 essay titled "The Prophet Puzzle," religious studies scholar Jan Shipps offered a new framing for understanding Mormonism's first modern-day prophet, Joseph Smith Junior.¹ As Shipps explained her new approach, she spent a few sentences describing the events that led up to the disappearance of the first 116 pages of the manuscript of the Book of Mormon. This she attributed to the wife of Martin Harris, who was serving as one of Joseph Smith's scribes. Shipps explained that Lucy Harris "had never liked Joseph Smith, and she heartily disapproved of her husband's association with him." Therefore, Shipps recounted, "When [Lucy] got her hands on the manuscript, she destroyed it."² While the episode played only a minor role in Shipps's discussion, the assumptions she made are quite telling. Within a few sentences, readers learned that Lucy Harris was unpleasant and that she destroyed scripture. Without reference or footnote, Shipps showed readers that these accounts of Harris were simply accepted as factual and widely known narratives of the early Mormon community.³

Much like Eve in the history of Christianity, Lucy Harris's reputation has been maligned in Latter-day Saint memory.⁴ She is blamed for the destruction of scripture at a particularly vulnerable moment in the church's history and she is held up as a disagreeable and improper woman. Yet these narratives about Lucy Harris are simply the accrual of many accounts over time, each of which draws upon and embellishes the previous one. There is scant evidence that Lucy Harris was the type of person she is remembered as, or that she did the deeds attributed to her. Instead the accretion of stories surrounding her demonstrates the creation of tradition, the building up of narratives until they become accepted as factual and widely

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known accounts. Sociologist Danièle Hervieu-Léger has argued that religion is a “chain of memory”—that “a religion is an ideological, practical and symbolic system through which consciousness, both individual and collective, of belonging to a particular chain of belief is constituted, maintained, developed, and controlled.”⁵ Membership in the LDS Church, then, might fruitfully be seen as belonging to the chain of memory that preserves, retells, and ritualizes the stories of its past. For contemporary Latter-day Saints, those stories about long-ago times sustain the community, but they also communicate important lessons about how to be a Latter-day Saint in the present day. Told often enough and embellished for particular historical and cultural contexts, the stories of Lucy Harris have operated as object lessons in how to do gender and faith.

Storytelling about Lucy Harris offers one example in the history of the Mormon tradition and in American religious history more broadly of how oft-told narratives become the bedrock of religious communities. Harris, though, is not the only woman whose life the chain of memory has narrated in service of larger claims about gender. Another such example is Emma Smith, Joseph Smith's first wife. Because Emma did not follow Brigham Young westward to Utah, but rather stayed in the Midwest and took part in the creation of the Reorganized Latter Day Saints around Joseph Smith III, a Mormon movement that did not practice polygamy, her place in Latter-day Saint memory was always fraught. As Lee Wiles and Stephen Taysom have argued, it was not until fairly recently that Emma Smith's position in Latter-day Saint memory was secured as a model of femininity and (rather ironically) monogamous marriage.⁶ Quincy D. Newell has also demonstrated how the narration of Jane Manning James, one of the earliest Black converts to Mormonism, has been deployed in service of modern-day Latter-day Saint identity work: James's story is held up and narrated to support a broader message that the church, despite its well-known and complicated racial past, has always been accepting and welcoming of racial diversity.⁷

Although Lucy Harris is best known among Latter-day Saints as the reason that the first 116 manuscript pages of the *Book of Mormon* were lost, or perhaps deliberately destroyed, the earliest accounts of this disastrous development, recorded in the Latter-day Saints' *Doctrine and Covenants* sections 3 and 10, did not mention Lucy Harris. Instead, the only figures who played a role were masculine: God and Satan, Joseph Smith and Martin Harris, and the “wicked men” who schemed to thwart God's plans. Nevertheless, by the late nineteenth century, Latter-day Saint narrations of this episode supersized Lucy Harris's minor role and frequently saddled her with the blame for the manuscript's loss. How, and more importantly,

why did a story that was all about men come to star a woman as the primary malefactor?

Drawing on Hervieu-Léger's description of religion as a "chain of memory," we attend here to how gender works in the particular Latter-day Saint memory of the loss of the 116 pages and in other memories of Lucy Harris's role in the production of the *Book of Mormon*. Tracing the discourse around Lucy Harris reveals that, as the chain of Latter-day Saint memory is constructed, ideas about gender are baked into its bones and fleshed out in its stories about itself. In this essay, we argue that, through much of the LDS Church's history, discussion of Lucy Harris by Latter-day Saint commentators, for Latter-day Saint audiences, has provided a means to illuminate accepted boundaries of femininity and, especially, appropriate feminine modes of witness and expressions of faith and doubt. The figure of Lucy Harris, as a collective memory of the LDS Church, is thus a powerful but malleable medium through which gender norms are taught, performed, and disciplined.

Narrating Lucy

We always encounter Lucy Harris through someone else's lens. Virtually all the stories Latter-day Saints tell about Harris rely on Lucy Mack Smith's 1845 autobiographical narrative, which focused on Smith's role as mother to the prophet Joseph Smith in the founding era of Mormonism. Harris herself generated few documents that remain, none of which told the stories of her life that Smith did. What little narrative remains in Harris's voice is found in an affidavit written after the events that Smith recounts and after Harris's marriage had all but dissolved.⁸ While it reveals Lucy Harris's perspective on her husband, whom she ultimately viewed as unable to protect or provide for her family, the affidavit tells us little about Harris's own experiences of the Smiths, their religious views, and the production of the *Book of Mormon*. In addition to this affidavit, Lucy Harris left a few documents that point to an increasing frustration with her husband's connections with Joseph Smith. Martin failed to participate in the plowing and planting of the family farm because of his scribal work. What seemed to be the final straw in Lucy's frustrations was Martin's absence from the wedding of their daughter Lucy to Flanders Dyke. Less than a week after his absence, Lucy Harris filed two deeds in the Palmyra land records. The first was a deed made out to Peter Harris, Lucy's brother, that granted him eighty acres of land (representing Lucy's dowry).⁹ In the second document, Peter deeded the land to Lucy. This maneuver

allowed them to circumvent legal practices pertaining to marital property. What we see in the deeds, particularly in the first, which Lucy had prepared three years earlier in 1825 but did not file until Martin's failure to look after his farm and family, is a woman working to ensure her own and her family's financial stability.¹⁰ These legal documents, however, can only hint at Lucy Harris's experience with the origins of the Mormon movement.

Instead of a narrative written by Harris, we have Lucy Mack Smith's account, written not long after the 1844 deaths of her sons Joseph and Hyrum. This text tells us a great deal about Lucy Mack Smith's understanding of herself in the world. In Smith's hands, Lucy Harris became a foil, a character whose flaws helped Smith's virtues stand out all the more. As Smith portrayed her, Harris was a woman who did not do womanhood properly and subsequently lost her ability to see what was godly and true.

Throughout her memoir, Smith positioned herself as a good mother, particularly to Joseph Smith. Lucy Mack Smith's "domestic spirituality," where wife, mother, and believer merged into one, contrasted sharply with her descriptions of Lucy Harris. Smith told the story of going to speak to Martin Harris on Joseph's behalf, an errand that she "somewhat disliked for [Harris's] wife was a peculiar sort of a woman one that was habitually of a very jealous temperment [*sic*] and being hard of hearing she was always suspicious of some secret being in agitation."¹¹ When Smith arrived at the Harris home, she recalled that Lucy Harris did not even let her finish her story, but offered money that "she had at her own command . . . which her husband permitted [*sic*] her to keep to satisfy her peculiar disposition."¹² Here Smith clearly demonstrated that she did not see Harris as taking on the role of the proper wife; rather, Harris was jealous, ill-tempered, and so bothersome to her husband that he had to allow her finances of her own. Harris clearly did not live up to the ideals of the "Cult of True Womanhood," as historian Barbara Welter described it in her classic article of that name. The "four cardinal virtues" of (white, middle-class, northern) American femininity, "piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity," were all conspicuously absent in Smith's description of Lucy Harris.¹³

Later, when Joseph Smith sent Martin Harris to New York City with a copy of some of the characters from the plates to show to scholars in order to test their legitimacy, Lucy Harris demanded that she be allowed to accompany her husband. When he left without her, Lucy Mack Smith recalled that Lucy Harris was enraged and accused Lucy Mack Smith of plotting against her. "I told her I had nothing to do with the plan nor the execution of it that the business of the House which were the natural cares of a woman were all that I

at[t]empted to dictate or interfere with unless by my Husband[']s or son[']s request," she wrote.¹⁴ As Smith narrated the story, Lucy Harris failed to understand her place in the patriarchal order of things. This inability to know her place was intertwined with her inability to see or accept the religious truth when it was shown to her. When Lucy Harris visited the Smiths, she demanded to see the gold plates. Joseph's response was that he would rather deal with her husband: "This highly displeased Mrs[.] Harris for she was a woman who piqued herself upon her superiority to her husband."¹⁵ Again unable to see her proper place, Harris required her own witness, promising to financially support Joseph Smith if she could just witness the truth. That night, Smith recounted, Lucy Harris had a dream in which a "personage" appeared to her and told her that she should not dispute a "servant of the Lord." The personage allowed her to see the plates and, when Harris awoke, she returned to the Smiths with the desire to give Joseph money. Smith told this portion of the story without questioning the account of divine intervention: Lucy Harris was given a witness to the truth.

Later, however, this witness would prove insufficient for Lucy Harris. Smith recounted that Harris went to the Smiths' house and again insisted that she be able to see the gold plates. Because of her insistence, Joseph had to "take them out of the house and bury [them]. For she began by ransack[ing] every nook & corner of the house[,] chest[,] cupboard[, and] trunk."¹⁶ In what Smith described as a frenzied, out-of-control search, Lucy Harris turned to the outside world. There she encountered a black snake, which gave her such a fright that she gave up. Just what the black snake represented to Smith is unclear, but it seemed to be a portent of what was to come. As the time her husband spent with Joseph increased, Harris's dissatisfaction mounted and she began to tell the neighbors that Joseph Smith was a fraud: "She told them that he was a grand imposter that he had deceived her [husband with] specious pretensions and was exerting all his deceptive powers" over Martin Harris in a get-rich-quick scheme, Lucy Mack Smith recalled.

Later, and in order to placate his doubting wife, Martin Harris asked Joseph if he could show Lucy and his family the 116 pages they had translated thus far. In Lucy Mack Smith's narrative, it was Lucy Harris's nagging that required this new round of evidence. After asking several times in prayer, Joseph allowed Martin to take the pages home, making him promise to show them only to a small group of family and trusted friends. The Harrises locked the pages in Lucy's bureau. When she was away, Martin decided to show the manuscript to another friend beyond the small number to which he had agreed. Unable to unlock the bureau without his wife's key, he

broke into it. When Lucy returned home, she saw her bureau in pieces and her "temper knew no bounds and an intolerable storm ensued throughout the house which descended with greatest force upon the head of the devoted husband."¹⁷ While it seems entirely understandable that Lucy Harris would be angry that her husband destroyed her bureau when he could have waited for her to return with the key, Smith showed her sympathies quite clearly in this passage. Martin was a "devoted husband," who did not deserve a wife who could not control her anger and who again disrupted the peace of her home. Lucy Harris's failure to exhibit the submissiveness and domesticity expected of white American women during this era made her the primary cause of conflict, in Lucy Mack Smith's telling.

Lucy Harris's attempts to thwart her husband led her to become an obstacle to Joseph's ability to bring the truth to the world. She stubbornly "fixed in her mind" a determination to stop him "from accomplishing the work which was about." She mounted her horse and "flew through the neighborhood like a dark spirit from house to house. . . [stopping anywhere] she had the least hope of gleaning anything that would subserve her purpose which was to prove that Joseph had *not* the record which he pretended to have." Later she signed an affidavit in a court case against Joseph. The affidavit claimed that Joseph Smith wanted to defraud her husband and that "she did not believe that Joseph Smith had ever been in possession of the Gold plates."¹⁸ Depicting Harris as a woman unable to keep her own counsel, to trust her husband to do what was right for their family, to maintain her home, or to believe the evidence she had received that the *Book of Mormon* was a true witness of God, Smith connected Lucy Harris's doubt to her improper femininity, making Smith's own example shine all the more brightly. The high regard in which Smith's memoir is held by Latter-day Saints, and the scarcity of other sources on Lucy Harris, have given Smith's portrayal of Harris an inflated influence on later narratives of early church history.¹⁹ These later retellings, however, have been less concerned with burnishing Lucy Mack Smith's image, and more intent on demonstrating how women ought to behave (by showing how they should *not* behave); on punishing poor performances of femininity, both rhetorically and in real life; and on constituting and reinforcing ideas about "good" and "bad" femininity through its performance.

Teaching Gender

The conceptual distance from using Lucy Harris to make Lucy Mack Smith's femininity shine, to focusing more squarely on Lucy

Harris as an example of what *not* to do, is short. Articles in the *Young Woman's Journal*, a Latter-day Saint periodical, illustrate this shift.²⁰ The *Young Woman's Journal* was, as its title suggests, a periodical published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for Latter-day Saint young women and those who taught them. Between its covers, readers found religious lessons, nonfiction articles on subjects the editors believed would be of interest, didactic fiction, and poetry, among other genres. The publication run of the *Young Woman's Journal* coincided roughly with a period in LDS history when the church was "Americanizing": after a lengthy period of conflict with the U.S. government, church leaders had come to the conclusion that the church and its members had to assimilate into U.S. society. The institution reconfigured rituals and beliefs to accommodate the largely Protestant structures of society, abandoning its quest to legalize plural marriage and moving rituals that marked Latter-day Saints as different into the private space of Latter-day Saint temples.²¹ Latter-day Saint women and men likewise strove to become more like their Protestant American counterparts, choosing to align themselves more closely with broader gender expectations.²²

Lessons in the *Young Woman's Journal* that discussed Lucy Harris sometimes explicitly instructed readers about gender performance. For example, an 1892 lesson on "The Translation of the Book of Mormon" instructed teachers how to teach a class of girls to be good wives by suppressing curiosity about things their husbands ought not share with them. Ostensibly, the lesson was about the coming forth of the *Book of Mormon*, but the author had a specific point to make about the role of women:

There is nothing so disagreeable and so liable to lead to mischievous consequences as a persistent, vulgar curiosity upon the part of man or woman. Whether justly or not, history has recorded many more troubles brought about by the silly and determined curiosity of women than any that has been shown by men. . . . It was a woman's curiosity which led Joseph and Martin into such terrible straights; that curiosity, it must be admitted, was shared by Martin himself, but it originated with a woman.²³

Without ever naming Lucy Harris, the author here attributed to her a "persistent, vulgar curiosity" that led her husband and the prophet into "such terrible straights," resulting in "mischievous consequences." Admitting that Martin Harris shared his wife's curiosity, the author nonetheless placed the blame for the loss of the 116 pages squarely on Lucy Harris's shoulders. The moral of the

story, according to the author, was that such curiosity must be avoided at all costs. "When you are married, you will discover that your husband, if in responsible positions, will hear and know of many things that he should not repeat to you. When you find this out, force yourself to believe that you do not want to know these secrets, and by and by it will actually be so with you."²⁴ Perhaps Lucy Harris's problem was that she did not "force [her]self to believe."

Not quite a decade later, a lesson on "Martin Harris, His Labors and Defalcation" taught a similar lesson about the proper behavior of wives. Rather than admonishing learners to "force [themselves] to believe that [they] do not want to know" their husbands' secrets, the author focused on teaching girls not to "coax" those secrets out of their husbands (and, secondarily, to prefer as marriage candidates men who could not be easily coaxed). Like the earlier lesson, this lesson focused on Martin Harris, while also subtly implicating Lucy Harris. Instead of indicting Lucy Harris's curiosity, though, this lesson identified the problem as her willingness to exploit her husband's weakness. "Each man has his weakness," the author informed readers in the lesson's introduction. "Some are moved by vanity, others by selfishness, some by continued coaxing and still others by fear or avarice," the text continued, before stating plainly: "Martin could be coaxed; a grave weakness in a strong man, as events proved."²⁵ The lesson established Martin Harris as a man of faith, but "faith, always in need of a little bolstering," and then turned to the 116 manuscript pages.

One hundred and sixteen pages were thus translated; and then Martin[,] himself subjected to persuasions from his wife, began coaxing Joseph to let him take the copied pages to his wife and relatives to further bolster his own faith. . . . Joseph, in turn, asked the Lord, and at last, all were given their desires, with the most direful results. The pages were taken away and have never been recovered since. Joseph's gift, and the plates, with the Urim and Thummim and seer stone, were all taken from him, and Joseph was left to mourn his own disobedient willfulness, as well as the wickedness and treachery of those who had betrayed him.²⁶

For this author, Martin Harris's weakness as a man who "could be coaxed" and his persistent need to bolster his own faith seemed to be the main causal factor in the disappearance of the 116 pages, but Lucy Harris lurked in the margins, exploiting those weaknesses to her husband's, and Joseph Smith's, detriment. The author's use of the passive voice in narrating the manuscript's loss is notable: by saying that "the pages were taken away" and that

“Joseph’s gift, and the plates, with the Urim and Thummim and seer stone, were all taken from him,” the author suggested that the loss was divinely driven and all brought about because of Smith’s “disobedient willfulness, as well as the wickedness and treachery of those who had betrayed him”—Martin Harris and, perhaps, Lucy Harris as well.

A series of comprehension and discussion questions followed the text of the main lesson, and these drove home the point that “coaxing” was not an incidental aspect of the story. “What is the effect of coaxing?” asked the author, continuing: “Is it ever productive of good? When? What is the difference between reasoning and coaxing?”²⁷ In the lesson, Martin Harris was described as a man who “could be coaxed,” but he was also described as a man who coaxes, thus leading his prophet into error. This characteristic—coaxability and coaxing—presented a Martin Harris who was less than fully masculine, whose weakness of character meant his faith needed bolstering and his will was not completely under his own control. It also suggested that Lucy Harris took advantage of her husband’s coaxable nature, rather than “forc[ing] [her]self to believe that [she did] not want to know [his] secrets,” as the author of the 1892 lesson had admonished girls to do.

Taken together, these lessons published around the turn of the twentieth century presented a clear ideal of both masculinity and femininity that aligned easily with prevailing Protestant American gender norms. Men were to be upright, reasonable, and strong in their faith, people who could be trusted to keep the confidences of their co-religionists. Women were to follow their husbands’ lead, trusting the men to share what they could and not succumbing to the temptation of manipulating their husbands to satisfy their own selfish curiosity.²⁸ By passing along the story of how the 116 pages were lost, Latter-day Saints preserved the chain of memory that acted as the backbone of their tradition while conveying lessons for the current generation about how to properly perform their gender identities. Those lessons were not incidental to the chain of memory, but constitutive of it: as Latter-day Saints conveyed the stories of their tradition, they also taught the following generations how to be men and women within that tradition.

A century later, the LDS Church’s publications and the gender norms they teach have changed significantly, as have the church and its host societies. The LDS Church has gone global, establishing congregations and building temples around the world. At the same time that the majority of its members live outside North America, the church remains deeply American in important ways: its administrative center resides in Salt Lake City, Utah; its institutional

structures are modeled after twentieth-century American corporations and bureaucracies; and its gender and family norms are rooted in middle-class white American models that reached their peak popularity in the middle of the twentieth century.²⁹ Having moved from not-American-enough at the beginning of the twentieth century, to model-American by the beginning of the twenty-first, the LDS Church now finds itself dug into a conservative stance on gender and family that is losing ground in the United States. Deeply invested in a model of heterosexual gender complementarity, the church has found common ground with white evangelical Christians and has worked to amplify the overlaps between the two groups.³⁰

In the twenty-first century, the LDS Church's portrayal of Lucy and Martin Harris has focused less on their relationship to one another and more on the gender performances of each member of the couple in relation to the wider community. The church began publishing *Saints*, a new four-volume narrative history of the LDS Church, in 2018.³¹ Lucy Harris appeared by name in only two of the ninety chapters of *Saints* published at the time of this writing, but she continued to function as a crucial teaching tool, demonstrating by her negative example how women were expected to behave themselves in public—both in Joseph Smith's time and in the present day. Lucy Harris first appeared in the story as an uninvited, and unwelcome, guest of Joseph and Emma Smith, accompanying her husband Martin who had traveled to Harmony, Pennsylvania, to help with the translation of the plates. The text stated that "both HARRISES had strong personalities," but Martin Harris's arrival was cast as a chance for the pregnant Emma Smith to rest before the birth of her child, whereas Lucy Harris "had insisted on coming with him."³² The text explained further that "Lucy was suspicious of Martin's desire to support Joseph financially and was angry that he had gone to New York City without her. When he told her he was going to Harmony to help with translation, she had invited herself along, determined to see the plates."³³

The following paragraphs filled in the details of a deeply unflattering portrait of Lucy Harris: the text noted that "when she could not understand what people were saying, she sometimes thought they were criticizing her,"³⁴ but went on to assert that Lucy Harris "also had little sense of privacy" and that when Joseph Smith refused to allow her to see the gold plates, "she started searching the house, rifling through the family's chests, cupboards, and trunks."³⁵ Moving to stay with a neighbor, Lucy then began "telling the neighbors that Joseph was out to get Martin's money."³⁶ Finally, "after weeks of causing trouble, Lucy went home to Palmyra"³⁷ and "peace [was] restored."³⁸ In the space of eleven sentences, Lucy

Harris emerged here as a whirlwind of discord and disorder, inviting herself to stay in someone else's home, improperly acting the role of the guest by snooping through the hosts' possessions, and finally spreading rumors and making false accusations about Joseph Smith. The problem was not Lucy Harris's "strong personality," which the text pointed out was a characteristic that she shared with her husband. Instead, she behaved improperly as a female guest: rather than helping her hosts with the housekeeping, she "rifled" through their things and then, after moving, badmouthed her previous hosts.

Lucy's failure to conform to feminine norms continued in the following chapter. Rather than submitting to her husband, Martin Harris informed Joseph Smith that Lucy "filed a complaint in court, claiming Joseph was a fraud who pretended to translate gold plates." Martin himself expected that "he would have to declare that Joseph had fooled him, or Lucy would charge him with deceit as well."³⁹ An off-stage character in the story at this point, Lucy continued to step out of her place, airing her marital discord in public by bringing a lawsuit against Joseph Smith. Martin Harris turned to the Smith family for help. Joseph Smith, in turn, prayed for guidance and ultimately received a revelation in which God refused to "provide [Martin] any more evidence until Martin chose to be humble and exercise faith."⁴⁰ Nevertheless, "the Lord promised to treat Martin mercifully. . . if he did as Joseph had done that summer and humbled himself, trusted in God, and learned from his mistakes," even dangling the prospect of being one of the three witnesses who would ultimately see the plates.⁴¹

Martin Harris, it seems, finally learned his lesson and stopped trying to appease his wife. "When Martin stood before the judge," the text told its readers, "he offered a simple, powerful testimony. . . . [H]e witnessed of the truth of the gold plates and declared that he had freely given Joseph fifty dollars to do the Lord's work."⁴² Martin's refusal of his wife's demands for proof finally restored the gender order: "With no evidence to prove Lucy's accusations, the court dismissed the case,"⁴³ remanding Lucy Harris to the private sphere to work out her disagreements with her husband out of the public eye. The demand for evidence had been a consistent drumbeat of Lucy Harris's discontent throughout her family's involvement with Joseph Smith's prophetic project. It had motivated much of her improper, un-feminine behavior, and had been a consistent theme in Martin Harris's efforts to gain favor with her. Ironically, it had now become the means of shutting down her disruption of the budding Mormon movement: the courts that so regularly facilitated harassment of Joseph Smith in this case protected him, putting Lucy Harris back in her place.

Disciplining Gender

The treatment of Lucy Harris in *Saints* illustrated the truth of Judith Butler's observation that "we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right."⁴⁴ The narrative showed Lucy Harris being punished, as when she lost in court, and it exposed her to further punishment, shaming her to readers. Even as Latter-day Saints represented Lucy Harris as a bad girl, they also show her suffering the consequences of doing her gender wrongly. In this way, Harris was disciplined, over and over, for her improper performance of femininity. While her story was also used to keep Latter-day Saint women in line, it communicated to believers that faith and "true" femininity were inextricably bound.

As a character, Lucy Harris was punished by being represented as repellent, both physically and socially. The accounts we have analyzed thus far consistently presented Harris as an unpleasant woman to be around, but few went as far as a 1907 account by John Henry Evans in the LDS periodical *Juvenile Instructor*. As part of a series of "Short Stories from Church History," Evans depicted Joseph and Emma Smith talking about Martin Harris in anticipation of his arrival at their home. "I hope he won't bring his wife with him," Joseph remarked to Emma, continuing, "You know she doesn't want him to have anything to do with me and the Plates." Emma responded, "He certainly won't bring her with him. What could she do but mischief?" Joseph's answer was indirect: "Mr. Harris is not entirely his own manager. . . . Sometimes he breaks loose from her influence, but not often, and then he makes her toe the mark. If she's on one of her rampages now, she'd have no scruples about coming the full hundred and seventy odd miles here just to see what she could find out." After recounting some of Lucy Harris's misdeeds, he concluded, "Mrs. Harris is good enough at times, but when the evil influence gets possession of her she does act mean!"⁴⁵ Here, Lucy Harris received the same treatment—backbiting—to which she was elsewhere accused of subjecting others. In Evans's telling, Emma and Joseph clearly had low opinions of her as a woman who exercised too much control over her husband. Later on in the story, Martin Harris knocked at the door, and Joseph Smith greeted him enthusiastically, "grasping his hand" and urging him to "Come in!" When Martin Harris informed Smith that Lucy Harris had also come, the response was tepid: "'Well, bring her in, too,' said Joseph. 'I guess we can find a place for her.'"⁴⁶

Evans could reasonably expect that his regular readers would sympathize with Joseph Smith's lack of enthusiasm for Lucy Harris: in Evans's story the previous month, readers learned that it was due to

Lucy Harris's loose tongue that a mob found out that Smith had acquired the golden plates. The mob leader, Willard Chase, told the gathered men that Lucy Harris had "got it in for the Smiths. She don't like any of them. I could almost trust her with all my plans."⁴⁷ In the present installment, Lucy Harris showed up as an uninvited guest and proceeded to "[tell] Joseph [Smith] that she was going to find those Plates if she had to stay there all summer." Evans went on to narrate Lucy Harris's search for the plates, culminating in the woods, where "she was horrified to find a great black-snake [*sic*] coiled up there. She ran terrified to the house, crying out to her husband what she had seen."⁴⁸ This fright seemed to startle Lucy Harris back into a more acceptable model of femininity: she ran to her husband, and then "gave up her search." Evans told his readers that "soon afterwards she went to live at a friend of hers" nearby, and he never mentioned her again.⁴⁹

A century later, a comic-book-style representation of Harris that was published in the church's magazine for children, *Friend*, most fully exemplified the narrative punishment of her transgression of gender norms. In two full pages of images, this installment of a serialized feature on Joseph Smith's life and experiences presented Smith's travails in keeping the golden plates safe. In the first five panels, Joseph Smith thwarted the malicious efforts of two different mobs. A text box informed readers that "[s]o many people tried to steal the plates that Joseph and Emma moved from New York to Pennsylvania. Even there, some people would not leave them alone." The image that accompanied this text about "some people" was the reader's first introduction to Lucy Harris, who stood at the door of a house speaking to Joseph and Emma Smith. "My husband, Martin, and I have given you money to help you translate," she said, shaking her finger at the couple. "I deserve to see those plates! I won't leave until I see them."⁵⁰ Harris's scolding of the young couple, and her presumption of a right, based on her husband's contributions to Smith's work, illustrated her departure from the accepted norms of femininity. If anyone had a right to demand to see the plates, it was Martin Harris, who should have held authority as Lucy Harris's husband.

Visually representing Lucy Harris as the embodiment of femininity gone wrong, the *Friend* feature depicted Lucy Harris as a crone, in stark contrast to other women in the series who were drawn in more favorable, attractive ways. In the panel immediately following Lucy Harris's initial appearance, the reader learned about her search of the Smith household for the golden plates and her eventual encounter with a black snake in the nearby woods. In the illustration, Harris spoke to Emma Smith, a thought-bubble in

shades of blue and gray illustrating the experience she recounted. "Emma," she says, "I didn't think there were snakes in this part of the country in the winter. I'm sure I found the place where Joseph buried the plates. But as soon as I started to clear away the snow, a horrible black snake appeared and hissed at me. I was so frightened I ran all the way back here!" Emma Smith appeared in the extreme foreground, with only her head and shoulders visible in front of Harris's word bubble. Her youthful, unlined face, arranged in an expression of calm interest and surrounded by her smooth, uncovered hair, was the most prominent feature in the panel, located almost exactly in the vertical center of the panel. Lucy Harris, located below and to the viewer's right, took up more space, but her face was only half as large. Harris wore a wide-eyed expression, her hands were raised as she spoke, her face was pale and lined with age, and her bonnet was tied tightly, framing her face with a mauve ruff.⁵¹ The contrast between Smith's youth and Harris's age was arresting, even more so because the same markers of age were not drawn on Lucy Mack Smith when she appeared in the series.⁵² In those installments, Lucy Smith—roughly the same age as Lucy Harris—appeared bare-headed, with her hair braided and coiled into a large bun on the back of her head. Her color was healthy, and she was always in motion toward one of the protagonists of the story, either her son Joseph or her daughter-in-law Emma.

Most striking was the scene depicted in Lucy Harris's thought bubble as she narrated her encounter with the snake. In this visual representation of her memory, Lucy Harris's face was frozen in an expression of terror. In the foreground of this scene, a large gray snake—the darkest object in the picture—lunged at Harris, mouth open, as if to strike. The effect was to render Harris not just horrified, but horrifying.⁵³ The conjunction of woman and snake symbolically connected Harris to the figure of Eve, who was tempted in the Garden of Eden by a snake. But here the roles were reversed: instead of tempting the woman into sin, the snake prevented her from obtaining the plates and thus transgressing God's command. The snake scared Harris out of the forest—and perhaps catalyzed her exit from the nascent Mormon community.

In this rendering of Harris's experience, the snake was a clear mechanism of Harris's punishment for doing femininity wrong: she refused to rely on the assurances already given her of the plates' existence and authenticity, instead ransacking the Smiths' home in search of them and scouring the woods to unearth them. Instead of finding the plates, though, Harris found the fright of her life in the form of the black snake. That such snakes were not known to be about in that place and season made crystal clear to readers that the

punishment was of divine origin, though Harris herself did not seem to recognize it.

Perhaps Lucy Harris's ultimate punishment—and the ultimate threat, to Latter-day Saint women and girls—lay in the devaluing of her status as a witness to what Latter-day Saints refer to as the “restoration of the gospel”—the sequence of events that led to the establishment of the Mormon movement and the divine truth of the messages communicated through those events. Most of the recognized witnesses are men, but there are a handful of women included as well. In telling Lucy Harris's story, Latter-day Saints outlined acceptable and (most often) unacceptable ways of combining the identities of woman and witness.

That there is a proper, gendered way for women to witness—and that Lucy Harris did not do so correctly—was made clear in a column by Keith W. Perkins in a 1992 issue of *Ensign*, the church's English-language magazine for adults. The column appeared in the magazine's regular “I Have a Question” section responding to the question, “Some historical records indicate that Mary Musselman Whitmer was privileged to see the gold plates, in addition to Joseph Smith and the Three and Eight Witnesses. Do we know of any other persons who may have seen or handled the plates?”⁵⁴ After reviewing Latter-day Saint scriptures about witnesses in general and the history of witnesses of the gold plates, Perkins turned to Lucy Harris's story. Relying on Lucy Mack Smith's account, Perkins told the story of Harris's experience, focusing on the dream in which she was shown the plates. As a result of that dream, Perkins wrote, “Mrs. Harris became so convinced of the truthfulness of the record. . . that she decided to give the Prophet Joseph Smith twenty-eight dollars she had received from her mother before she died; Mrs. Harris insisted that he take it to assist in bringing forth the Book of Mormon.”⁵⁵

But in Perkins's telling, things quickly turned sour: “I wish we could say that after this wonderful experience Lucy Harris became a great supporter of the work of the Restoration, but, sadly, this was not the case. She continued to insist to Joseph that she must see the plates,” and when this demand was not satisfied, “she became one of the persecutors of the Prophet.”⁵⁶ Based on this apparent about-face, Perkins characterized Lucy Harris as “lack[ing] the stability of others in her witness of the Book of Mormon.”⁵⁷

Perkins went on to compare Lucy Harris's witness to those of two other people: Oliver Cowdery and Emma Smith. Cowdery, Perkins noted, had “a similar experience” to Harris in that (according to Joseph Smith's account) God “appeared” to Cowdery “and showed unto him the plates in a vision.”⁵⁸ As Perkins's readers

knew, Cowdery later became one of the Three Witnesses, a group of men that also included Martin Harris. When Joseph Smith finished dictating the *Book of Mormon*, he prayed with these men and they were shown the plates by an angel. Their written testimony of this witness experience is now printed at the front of the *Book of Mormon*. After only three sentences on Cowdery, Perkins pivoted to a discussion of Emma Smith who, though not given the opportunity to see the plates, did "have close contact with the plates and the work of her husband."⁵⁹ Perkins quoted Emma Smith's words to her son Joseph Smith III: "I did not attempt to handle the plates, other than I have told you, nor uncover them to look at them. I was satisfied that it was the work of God, and therefore did not feel it to be necessary to do so."⁶⁰

The contrasts between Lucy Harris and these other witnesses were striking: Harris and Cowdery had similar visionary experiences, but Lucy Harris wanted and did not get the additional witness that Cowdery eventually had. Emma Smith was content with the attenuated experience of the plates that she had, and bore what Perkins called a "powerful witness and testimony of the book,"⁶¹ while Lucy Harris, because she was not satisfied with the limited evidence she was granted, became a witness who lacked "stability." The proper way to witness, then, seemed to be gendered: for men, a vision might be a precursor to a more substantial witness of the plates, but for women, a vision was all that could be hoped for. Mary Whitmer, to whose witness the opening question alluded, and Emma Smith were two such examples and the response of these women was to believe steadfastly. Lucy Harris responded to her vision by giving Joseph Smith twenty-eight dollars. Yet it was Cowdery who was rewarded first by scribing for Smith and then by becoming one of the Three Witnesses. All of these juxtapositions made clear that it was unacceptable for women to desire more witness experiences than they were given. At the same time that Lucy Harris was disciplined in Mormon memory for wanting more, her act of faith evidenced by the gift of twenty-eight dollars was never rewarded.

Performing Gender

Gender studies scholars now widely agree that gender is a performance that we put on for others and ourselves, so the performances happen in everything that we do: how we speak, how we move through the world, how we inhabit our bodies, and how we interact with others. And the stories of Lucy Harris have certainly

been used to teach young girls, especially, how to perform femininity. But gender is also part of theatrical performances. In 1983, Rhett Stephens James wrote a musical about Martin and Lucy Harris titled *The Man Who Knew: The Early Years: A Play about Martin Harris*. In the following decades Latter-day Saints produced the musical as a pageant in Clarkston, Utah, the site of Martin's grave. Even though Mormon pageants always purport to be recounting a historical narrative, as was the case with the Harris pageant, their main goal is not to teach believers historical facts but to elicit an emotional response to the church's memory, cementing viewers' place in the church's chain of memory. The Martin Harris pageant put gender, faith, and doubt on the stage for more than four hundred thousand primarily Latter-day Saint audience members, reinforcing the church's teachings about gender and suggesting that expectations for femininity and masculinity were not, in fact, malleable, but had remained unchanged throughout history.

Staged in the Clarkston cemetery, the pageant took place in a setting ripe for interpretations tied to witnessing, priesthood, and masculinity. James framed *The Man Who Knew* around Jimmy, a modern-day boy who felt like he did not belong and was unsure about what the truth was. In his first song, Jimmy sang about wanting to "find [his] certainty," suggesting that it was through witnessing that he might become a man sure of his faith. Jimmy was then transported back in time to observe Martin Harris during the coming forth of the *Book of Mormon*. Jimmy was accompanied by "The Man"—a stand-in for all older adult men helping to lead younger men on their journey to manhood—who observed, counseled, and provided commentary about the history Jimmy witnessed.⁶²

As Jimmy observed the Harrises and their peers, The Man explained that they were "folks who crossed over the line . . . of for and against." The "for and against" to which he referred regarded the truth that Joseph Smith taught. The Man mused to Jimmy that once a person had chosen sides they could never go back: "That's the way real religious truth works. It's a separator."⁶³ Jimmy asked The Man if Lucy ever crossed over the line and The Man said he would show Jimmy "how it happened." Thus the musical was set up around the question of truth: who received and accepted it and who did not.

In this framework, Lucy Harris was portrayed as a woman who, like the biblical Thomas, wanted proof: she wanted to see and touch in order to believe. Lucy bargained with Joseph Smith, "If I can get a witness, like Martin that you speak the truth, I will believe all you say about the matter and I shall want to do something about

the translation. I mean to help you in any way."⁶⁴ After this scene, The Man told Jimmy that Lucy was the first to see the plates after Joseph; it was in a dream in which she was told that she had been asking "improper questions," had gone against God's expectations, and then was finally allowed to see them. However, he concluded cryptically, "[R]evelation comes to chasten, to instruct, to edify. Lucy felt all three. But she still was free."⁶⁵

In addition to being portrayed as full of doubt, Lucy was also depicted as a woman who stepped out of the bounds of acceptable womanhood. Like Jimmy, Lucy Harris was immediately presented as a seeker of truth, but as a woman, she was constantly frustrated by "men's business."⁶⁶ That frustration led her to be confrontational with her husband and unable to maintain a peaceful home. Yet at the same time that she appeared to critique the gendered expectations of her time, she was also portrayed as a woman who suffered from paranoia that the musical's author, Rhett James, attributed to her hearing loss. James thus simultaneously offered an explanation for Lucy's behavior—her hearing loss—and also suggested that the results of that hearing loss made her a less-than-ideal wife and community member.

While James depicted the Harris marriage in such a way that it appeared to be more equitable, something modern audiences might view as desirable, that equity was often made to look ridiculous. Lucy Harris was a woman who had her own "private purse," did not trust her husband when he was away, moved his belongings to the other side of the house when he did not fulfill her expectations, acted as if she was "possessed" when her husband would not do as she asked, and generally disrupted both her own and others' households. In contrast Martin was portrayed as constantly trying to placate his wife. The one time he seriously challenged Lucy was when she declared that she would not follow the *Book of Mormon* because she did not have proof. Martin responded: "If you wish to reside in this house, you will. If you wish to be my wife, you will. I won't have any member of my family not following the Lord!"⁶⁷ Reasonable Martin only got excitable when it appeared that his position as patriarch of a faithful household was in jeopardy. Through Martin's assertion of his authority—putting his foot down about how his wife would act in relationship to faith—the pageant affirmed the patriarchal order of marriage.

In the final scenes of the musical, an anxious Jimmy hoped that Lucy Harris would come around. He wondered what happened to the manuscript and The Man stated, "I don't know that I ever found out for sure. But let me show you what I think happened."⁶⁸ Thus the musical shifted from presenting its narrative as historical fact to suggesting that

the narrative was probable conjecture. The Man hypothesized that Lucy hid the 116 pages and allowed others to change the text. After Lucy confessed to these actions, the musical built on this theory and added that, in an attempt to save her marriage after her confession, Lucy burned the changed 116 pages because, as she sang, "A woman must fight for her man, / Or she's lost— / Alone . . . / I need him! / Martin, love only me, just me."⁶⁹ Faithful audience members surely sympathized with Jimmy shouting into the dark "Mrs. Harris! No!" as the pages burned to ashes.

In the final lines of the musical, Jimmy asked what happened to Martin Harris after the events narrated in the musical. The Man replied, "That's another story, Jimmy. What can be known about a man? There are many streams in a river, pictures from the soul. But let me tell you this: Martin always remained faithful to his testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. He was ordained to remember. It was his skill. He was called 'witness.'"⁷⁰ Thus the musical returned to its central concern, Martin Harris, and its central message, his witness. The final lines obscured the difficult and often antagonistic relationship between Martin Harris and the LDS Church that lasted through much of his life. Instead, the pageant connected masculinity and witness through the person of Martin and the phrase "ordained to remember." Martin's manhood, his priesthood, and his witness braided together to confirm that masculinity, faithfulness, and witness were one.

In 2009, the institutional church took control of the Martin Harris pageant and Lynn Larsen and Rodger Sorensen significantly revised the pageant script.⁷¹ While the 2009 show maintained and even heightened the pageant's emphasis on the concept of witness, it downplayed Lucy's role, focusing the drama primarily on men and the coming forth of the *Book of Mormon*. The new pageant began with the Testimony of the Three Witnesses found in the *Book of Mormon*, again cementing witness as the key concept explored throughout the drama. Rather than focusing on Lucy as the character who embodied wrong-headed doubt, the 2009 pageant identified the historical figure Pomeroy Tucker as the person who refused to believe. While he suggested that Martin might be wise enough to see through Smith's façade, Tucker ultimately concluded that "we don't believe in the same things anymore!"⁷² He rejected Martin's witness of the truth, standing steadfast in his doubt.

Because Tucker was the primary doubter, Lucy Harris was a more peripheral character, though her personality clearly remained sharp around the edges. Larsen and Sorensen depicted her as a woman who sought answers and was afraid of being left out of the excitement. Always needing evidence, Lucy actively sought out

Smith, wanting to touch the plates. Martin gently admonished her, but she insisted, "I wanted to know . . . I needed to know. Is there anything wrong with that?"⁷³ Like her consistent desire for evidence, Lucy's personality traits were simply a part of who she was. Talking to Martin, Joseph Smith observed, "When your wife sets her mind to something, it is hard to dissuade her."⁷⁴ In addition to these traits and her desire for evidence, the pageant noted a number of times that she believed: she believed Martin when he told her his experiences; she believed the dream she had confirming the truth; and, when Martin told her about talking with God, she said emphatically, "I believe you."⁷⁵ Still, while the playwrights softened her blame, guilt, and femininity-gone-wrong in this twenty-first-century pageant, they nevertheless used Lucy as a foil to amplify and cement the show's messages about Martin's proper masculinity and his witness. Perhaps more than in any other example of storytelling about Lucy Harris, the revised pageant demonstrated that there is no room for doubt in telling the story of the coming forth of the *Book of Mormon* in the modern day.

Larsen and Sorenson illustrated the marriage of Martin and Lucy as strong, but not without its difficulties. The authors portrayed Martin as a good husband, though he did not always see what he ought to be doing. His interests and desires were honest: he just wanted to be a good husband and provide his wife with what she needed. The pageant reflected the gender dynamics and tensions that the institutional church embraced in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In 1995, the First Presidency of the church issued "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," which stated that male and female were complementary, divinely sanctioned categories that were both essential and eternal and that men were to guide their families because of their roles as priests. At the same time that the Proclamation reinforced conservative notions of gender complementarity, gesturing toward a version of egalitarianism, it placed men in authority over their wives and other women, reinforcing a hierarchical model and creating a tension that tugged at the threads of the family structure.⁷⁶

In a nod toward gender complementarity, the 2009 pageant declared that both Lucy and Martin were responsible for the disappearance of the 116 pages, but did not announce a theory of what might have happened. Instead it blamed both characters equally: both showed the text to others and both did what they had been explicitly told not to do. After the loss of the pages both Martin and Lucy sang a song titled "Lament." Lucy worried that "I'll lose my family. I'll lose my home. / And I'll lose Martin, Martin will go / I'll be forsaken, be left on my own," while Martin sang, "What

have I done? / Does she know? / that I love her, I'll never go. All of this anger, that I hold inside. / It's shame and despair, a fear I can't hide." Here Lucy had quite gendered worries—loss of family, home, and husband. When Martin insisted on going to the Smiths', despite Lucy's fear that her family would "lose everything," her response was, "I'll be here at home."⁷⁷ This is how Lucy's role in the pageant ended. Her gendered worries ended up costing her everything. There was no room in this narrative for reasonable questions, for concerns about her own and her family's well-being. Lucy's doubt was dismissed as an obstacle in the way of truth seeking and manly witness.

Tellingly, the pageant did not mention what became of Lucy Harris. Like the earlier version, the 2009 pageant glossed over historical facts that complicated its narrative—in this case, the fact that Martin did leave Lucy—and returned in its final scene to the task of connecting witness and masculinity in the person of Martin Harris. The pageant ended with Martin proclaiming, "I know that Joseph Smith was God's Prophet. Saw the plates on which the Book of Mormon was written. I saw the angel, and I heard the voice of God."⁷⁸ Beginning and ending with Martin's witness, the pageant maintained as well that he was a good man and a good husband. Lucy Harris was not blamed, nor was she exonerated. She simply, and conveniently, disappeared.

Conclusion

In a February 2021 Twitter post, a historian of Mormonism asked, "What figure from Mormon history would you most like to date, and why?"⁷⁹ Amid myriad responses, one person offered, "Lucy Harris. I want to get on her good side so she'll tell me what she did with the Book of Lehi."⁸⁰ While the feed discussion was filled with humor, this short response tells us a lot about how Lucy Harris is remembered today: she was a difficult woman. She was responsible for the loss of sacred scripture. *She* made the modern day *us* lose out—the loss of scripture is a loss of sacred truths for everyone. Although the revelations that happened after the loss of the 116 pages assured believers that the key lessons of the lost pages would be found in other places, the desire to know scripture in full still causes believers to point to Lucy Harris as the antiwitness. While her husband witnessed to the truth of the church and the scriptures, she sought to undermine and destroy what was true. Lucy Harris is to blame and her failures have been summed up as her failure to do gender and faith right.

Recently, a pair of scholars at Brigham Young University has attempted to broaden Latter-day Saint understandings of witness and make the Mormon chain of memory more inclusive by sharing women's narratives surrounding the coming forth of the *Book of Mormon*. In 2015, professors Amy Easton-Flake and Rachel Cope published "A Multiplicity of Witnesses: Women and the Book of Mormon Translation Process" for a collection of essays on the coming forth of the *Book of Mormon*. The authors' project was to add women's voices and experiences to the narrative in order to expose "the truly communal effort it required."⁸¹ To achieve this goal, the authors explored the accounts of Mary Whitmer, Lucy Mack Smith, Lucy Harris, and Emma Hale Smith. They portray Lucy Harris as a true witness; nevertheless, the authors struggle to explain to a believing audience that, despite Harris's personality and her choices, she can still be seen as a member of the community of witnesses. Because of her gender, she requires an explanation for entry into the community whereas male witnesses do not.

For Easton-Flake and Cope, Lucy Mack Smith's narrative "introduces various ways of witnessing beyond the visual, including record keeping, sensory experiences, and spiritual impressions."⁸² Having to rely on Smith's narrative to engage Harris's experience, the two authors acknowledge that Lucy Harris is "typically remembered for her antagonism toward the Book of Mormon, in part because she claimed to have never actually believed in the gold plates following the manuscript's publication." They point out that Smith recalled that Harris "had received a powerful spiritual witness of the plates, followed by an audible and tangible witness of them. As a result of these experiences, Smith intimated, Harris had willingly donated a significant amount of money in order to help enable the translation of the Book of Mormon."⁸³

Easton-Flake and Cope acknowledge that Harris may be "disputed as a definitive witness, because she refuted the truth of Mormonism in an affidavit."⁸⁴ Nevertheless, they argue that "[h]er behavior is not uncommon and may even be expected in one who becomes antagonistic towards the Church and suffers either indirectly or directly because of Church connections." Thus, context is used to make her actions appear more reasonable than they seem in many accounts because they at least "make sense" for someone in the network of relationships in which she operated. Easton-Flake and Cope assert that "Lucy Smith's account of Lucy Harris should be viewed as a credible recollection of events, particularly since Lucy Smith does not appear to like Harris or have any reason for placing these experiences upon her."⁸⁵ Here Smith's feelings toward Harris are taken as evidence of the truthfulness of her memory of Harris's witness:

because Smith did not like Harris, Easton-Flake and Cope suggest, Smith can be understood as a reliable narrator of Harris's witness event. To include Harris in the community of witnesses—at least to an audience of believers—her personality and her displeasing nature are marked and finally dismissed as a means of undermining the witness account itself. Such approaches do not tend to appear in analyses of male witnesses. For example, Martin Harris's estrangement from the church is not usually offered as evidence for the reliability of his witness of the *Book of Mormon*. Instead, as *The Man Who Knew* demonstrated, such complications are often omitted in favor of a straightforward story. It is Lucy Harris's status as a woman and her failure to perform that gender properly that make the issue of personality and the choices she made important to the legitimacy of her religious experiences.

Easton-Flake and Cope claim that Harris is a witness even when the choices she made might indicate to a believing audience that her experiences are not to be trusted. They even defend her from accusations about the missing 116 pages:

Although she is often blamed for the disappearance of this manuscript, it is important to remember that she was intrigued by this visible witness and allowed Martin to protect the manuscript in her bureau. When Martin later discovered that the translated pages were missing, Lucy "solemnly averred" that she had not taken them. Even when Lucy Harris felt skeptical about the translation project, Smith's account suggests that she continued to believe in the plates' existence.⁸⁶

Yet again the authors defend Harris's belief even though the narratives that have cropped up around her have firmly placed her in the category of disbelief.

Easton-Flake and Cope are not the only modern-day narrators trying to exonerate Lucy Harris from accusations about her involvement in the loss of the 116 pages. In *The Lost 116 Pages: Reconstructing the Book of Mormon's Missing Stories*, Don Bradley also argues that Lucy Harris is not to blame for the loss of scripture. He notes that even in the narratives about the 116 pages, the manuscript did not disappear until *after* Martin had taken control of the document and placed it in his own bureau. And yet sources dating to as early as 1831 started to narrate Lucy's responsibility for the lost scripture and sources as early as 1851 attributed the destruction of the scripture to her.⁸⁷

As these accounts make clear, the historical record does not support the popular Latter-day Saint notion that Lucy Harris is

responsible for the loss of the 116 pages of the *Book of Mormon* manuscript. Why, then, did she become Mormonism's first bad girl? That Latter-day Saints would forego Harris's potential as a witness to the existence of the golden plates suggests that her story was more valuable for other ways it could be used. As we have shown in this analysis of Latter-day Saint narratives about her, by casting Lucy Harris in the role of villain, Latter-day Saints shifted blame away from Martin Harris, leaving his status as an early witness to the truth of Mormonism unsullied and the connection made through him between witness, priesthood, and masculinity intact. At the same time, Lucy Harris provided a figure through which to teach gender norms, punish the improper performance of femininity, and perform the disjunction between femininity and particular models of witness. Even as believing scholars like Easton-Flake and Cope attempt to rescue Harris from her disreputable history to create a more inclusive narrative of the coming forth of the church's foundational scripture, they find themselves coming up against a powerful accretion of stories that have been deployed for purposes other than history telling, serving an entirely different function in the chain of memory. We know next to nothing about the Lucy Harris of history, but the storytelling suggests we do. Mormonism's first bad girl has now experienced almost two hundred years of operating as a warning to believers of the dangers of doubt and failed femininity.

Quincy D. Newell is Professor of Religious Studies at Hamilton College.

Sara M. Patterson is Professor of Theological Studies and Gender Studies at Hanover College.

Notes

¹Formally known as Joseph Smith Junior, the founder of the Mormon movement is commonly referred to as "Joseph Smith." For consistency and ease of reading, we will omit the "Junior" from his name throughout the remainder of this essay.

²Jan Shippis, "The Prophet Puzzle: Suggestions Leading toward a More Comprehensive Interpretation of Joseph Smith," *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974): 17.

³When discussing the traditions that sprang out of the movement Joseph Smith formed in 1830 around the Book of Mormon, we use the terms *Mormon*, *Mormonism*, and *Mormon tradition*. When discussing the history and practices of the segment of the tradition that became the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the institutional church whose headquarters are in Salt Lake City),

we follow that church's request and refer to members as Latter-day Saints. On that institution's preferred nomenclature, see "Style Guide—The Name of the Church," Newsroom, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/style-guide>. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also requests that its name not be abbreviated. However, for ease of reading, we have employed the commonly understood abbreviation *LDS Church* throughout this essay.

⁴For a discussion of how Eve has been narrated over time, see Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

⁵Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, trans. Simon Lee (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 82.

⁶Lee Wiles, "Monogamy Underground: The Burial of Mormon Plural Marriage in the Graves of Joseph and Emma Smith," *Journal of Mormon History* 39, no. 3 (Summer 2013): 1–59; Stephen C. Taysom, "A Uniform and Common Recollection: Joseph Smith's Legacy, Polygamy, and the Creation of Mormon Public Memory, 1852–2002" *Dialogue* 35, no. 3 (2002): 113–44. The stakes surrounding memory work around Emma Smith were quite high. When Linda King Newell and Val Avery published a biography of Emma Smith in 1984 titled *Mormon Enigma*, a biography in which the authors identified Emma Smith as a complicated but strong woman who had been side-lined in Latter-day Saint history, LDS Church authorities instructed Newell and Avery's bishops that they should not be allowed to speak about Emma at church events. This ban lasted for ten months. See Linda King Newell and Val Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984). See also Colleen McDannell, *Sister Saints: Mormon Women since the End of Polygamy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

Quincy D. Newell, *Narrating Jane: Telling the Story of an Early African American Mormon Woman*, Leonard J. Arrington Mormon History Lecture Series 21 (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2016); Quincy D. Newell, *Your Sister in the Gospel: The Life of Jane Manning James, a Nineteenth-Century Black Mormon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁸Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled: Or, a Faithful Account of that Singular Imposition and Delusion, from Its Rise to the Present Time. With Sketches of the Characters of Its Propagators, and a Full Detail of the Manner in Which the Famous Golden Bible Was Brought before the World. To Which Are Added, Inquiries into the Probability That the Historical Part of the Said Bible Was Written by One Solomon Spalding, More than Twenty Years Ago, and by Him Intended to Have Been Published as a Romance* (Painesville, OH: by the author, 1834), 254–56.

⁹Lucy Harris's maiden name was Harris.

¹⁰For a discussion of these documents see Don Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages: Reconstructing the Book of Mormon's Missing Stories* (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2019), 56–61.

¹¹Lucy Mack Smith, *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir*, ed. Lavina Fielding Anderson (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 2001), 394.

¹²Smith, *Lucy's Book*, 395.

¹³Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2, part 1 (Summer 1966): 152.

¹⁴Smith, *Lucy's Book*, 402–403.

¹⁵Smith, *Lucy's Book*, 398.

¹⁶Smith, *Lucy's Book*, 406.

¹⁷Smith, *Lucy's Book*, 421.

¹⁸Smith, *Lucy's Book*, 441.

¹⁹Lucy Harris does appear twice in B. H. Roberts's magisterial *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1930), which first appeared in installments in *Americana* and was later published as a six-volume set. In both cases, she is relegated to the notes, and in both cases Roberts's attention is focused on the lack of evidence to substantiate elements of the standard narrative about Lucy and Martin Harris. The first note concerns the destruction of the 116 pages: "It is charged by some that Mrs. Harris, being unfriendly to the work, burned the manuscript but this she denied." Roberts, *Comprehensive History* 1, chapter 9, note 11. The second is about the financial arrangements Martin Harris made for the printing of the *Book of Mormon*, and includes information about Lucy Harris's refusal to participate:

In Kennedy's *Early Days of Mormonism*, that writer says that Harris gave his bond and a "mortgage on his farm," for the \$3,000. "As Mrs. Harris refused to be a party to the transaction, an agreement of separation between herself and husband was arranged. She received her share of the estate, some eighty acres of land and the farm house". . . There is nothing in our church annals, however, which confirms the statement that a mortgage was taken on the farm, beyond the declaration that Harris became security for the payment of \$3,000 to the printer. The farm was sold, or at least Mr. Harris' part of it, to Mr. Thomas Lackey to raise the money to pay the printer's bill. See statement of Amasa M. Lyman, who worked for Mr. Lackey in 1832.

Roberts, *Comprehensive History* 1, chapter 13, note 3.

²⁰We thank Kaela Dunne, Hamilton College class of 2022, who pored over the *Young Woman's Journal* in search of references to Lucy Harris, for her work in support of our research. We are grateful to Hamilton College for funding Dunne's work as a research assistant through the Emerson Foundation.

²¹Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

²²See, for example, Amy Hoyt and Sara M. Patterson, "Mormon Masculinity: Changing Gender Expectations in the Era of Transition from Polygamy to Monogamy, 1890–1920," *Gender and History* 23, no. 1 (April 2011): 72–91; Natalie Kaye Rose, "Courtship, Marriage, and Romantic Monogamy: Young Mormon Women's Diaries at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Mormon History* 42, no. 1 (January 2016): 166–98.

²³"The Translation of the Book of Mormon," 79–80.

²⁴"The Translation of the Book of Mormon," 80.

²⁵"Book of Mormon—Lesson VII: Martin Harris, His Labors and Defalcation," *Young Woman's Journal* 12, no. 3 (March 1901): 142.

²⁶"Martin Harris, His Labors and Defalcation," 142.

²⁷"Martin Harris, His Labors and Defalcation," 143.

²⁸See Hoyt and Patterson, "Mormon Masculinity."

²⁹See Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

³⁰Taylor Petrey, *Tabernacles of Clay: Sexuality and Gender in Modern Mormonism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 104–34.

³¹Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018, 2020). The two volumes that have been published so far are available online: <https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/saints?lang=eng>.

³²"Chapter 5: All Is Lost," *Liahona*, July 2018, accessed November 6, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2018/07/chapter-5-all-is-lost?lang=eng>.

³³"All Is Lost."

³⁴"All Is Lost."

³⁵"All Is Lost."

³⁶"All Is Lost."

³⁷"All Is Lost."

³⁸"All Is Lost."

³⁹"Chapter 6: The Gift and Power of God," *Liahona*, August 2018, accessed November 6, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2018/08/chapter-6-the-gift-and-power-of-god?lang=eng>.

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⁴⁰"The Gift and Power of God."

⁴¹"The Gift and Power of God."

⁴²"The Gift and Power of God."

⁴³"The Gift and Power of God."

⁴⁴Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 140.

⁴⁵John Henry Evans, "Short Stories from Church History V," *The Juvenile Instructor* 42, no. 19 (October 1, 1907): 581.

⁴⁶Evans, "Short Stories from Church History V," 582.

⁴⁷John Henry Evans, "Short Stories from Church History IV: A Struggle with the Adversary," *The Juvenile Instructor* 42, no. 18 (September 15, 1907): 553.

⁴⁸Evans, "Short Stories from Church History V," 582.

⁴⁹Evans, "Short Stories from Church History V," 582.

⁵⁰"Protecting the Gold Plates," *Friend*, June 2008, accessed November 6, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/friend/2008/06/protecting-the-gold-plates?lang=eng>.

⁵¹"Protecting the Gold Plates."

⁵²See "Emma Hale, the Prophet's Wife," *Friend*, April 2008, accessed November 6, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/friend/2008/04/emma-hale-the-prophets-wife?lang=eng>;

"Receiving the Gold Plates," *Friend*, May 2008, accessed November 6, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/friend/2008/05/receiving-the-gold-plates?lang=eng>.

⁵³"Protecting the Gold Plates."

⁵⁴Keith Perkins, "Which Persons May Have Seen or Handled the Gold Plates?," *Ensign*, July 1992, accessed November 6, 2020, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1992/07/i-have-a-question/which-persons-may-have-seen-or-handled-the-gold-plates?lang=eng>.

⁵⁵Perkins, "Which Persons."

⁵⁶Perkins, "Which Persons."

⁵⁷Perkins, "Which Persons."

⁵⁸Perkins, "Which Persons," quoting Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Co., 1984), 8.

⁵⁹Perkins, "Which Persons."

⁶⁰Perkins, "Which Persons," quoting *The Saints' Herald*, October 1, 1879, 290.

⁶¹Perkins, "Which Persons."

⁶²Rhett Stephens James, *The Man Who Knew: The Early Years: A Play about Martin Harris* (1983), 8.

⁶³James, *The Man Who Knew*, 32.

⁶⁴James, *The Man Who Knew*, 49–50.

⁶⁵James, *The Man Who Knew*, 49–50.

⁶⁶James, *The Man Who Knew*, 29.

⁶⁷James, *The Man Who Knew*, 148, 72.

⁶⁸James, *The Man Who Knew*, 71.

⁶⁹James, *The Man Who Knew*, 78.

⁷⁰James, *The Man Who Knew*, 85.

⁷¹A professor of theatre at Brigham Young University, Rodger Sorensen also worked in various roles—technical director, associate director, artistic director—for the Hill Cumorah Pageant through 2004. Lynn Larsen and Roger Sorensen, *Martin Harris: The Man Who Knew, a Pageant by Rhett James* (2009), 10, 41.

⁷²Larsen and Sorensen, *Martin Harris*, 10, 41.

⁷³Larsen and Sorensen, *Martin Harris*, 22.

⁷⁴Larsen and Sorensen, *Martin Harris*, 26.

⁷⁵Larsen and Sorensen, *Martin Harris*, 30.

⁷⁶This tension had its roots in the 1970s as the LDS Church attempted to reconcile its perspectives on women and their place in the world with the broader culture's shift toward greater egalitarianism. See Petrey, *Tabernacles of Clay*, 104–39. See also Caroline Kline, "Saying Goodbye to the Final Say: The Softening and Reimagining of Mormon Male Headship Ideologies" in *Out of Obscurity: Mormonism since 1945*, eds. Patrick Q. Mason and John G. Turner (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 214–33.

⁷⁷Larsen and Sorensen, *Martin Harris*, 61–62.

⁷⁸Larsen and Sorensen, *Martin Harris*, 70.

⁷⁹Benjamin E. Park (@BenjaminEPark), Twitter, February 15, 2021, 8:47 p.m., <https://twitter.com/bejaminepark/status/1361492407783686146?s=21>.

⁸⁰Steve Otteson (@sotteson), Twitter, February 15, 2021, 10:23 p.m., <https://twitter.com/sotteson/status/1361516412745830401?s=21>.

⁸¹Amy Easton-Flake and Rachel Cope, "A Multiplicity of Witnesses: Women and the Translation Process," in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Word and a Wonder*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Andrew H. Hedges, John Hilton III, and Kerry Hull (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2015), 133.

⁸²Easton-Flake and Cope, "A Multiplicity of Witnesses," 136.

⁸³Easton-Flake and Cope, "A Multiplicity of Witnesses," 141.

⁸⁴Easton-Flake and Cope, "A Multiplicity of Witnesses," 141.

⁸⁵Easton-Flake and Cope, "A Multiplicity of Witnesses," 150n42, emphasis added.

⁸⁶Easton-Flake and Cope, "A Multiplicity of Witnesses," 142–43.

⁸⁷Bradley, *The Lost 116 Pages*, 66–69.

ABSTRACT *Why has Lucy Harris been blamed for the loss of 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript? Analysis of storytelling about Lucy Harris, Mormonism's first "bad girl," allows us to see the creation of one element of the Latter-day Saint chain of memory. Through the accretion of stories about Lucy Harris, church members came to code doubt as feminine in Mormon memory while viewing the concept of witness as masculine. These understandings of the relationship between gender and religious faith are embedded understandings in the Latter-day Saint chain of memory. Preserving the memory and reputation of Martin Harris, Lucy's husband, scribe for the Book of Mormon, and one of its three witnesses, allowed Latter-day Saints to cement the intersections of masculinity, priesthood, and witness. Church members used stories about Lucy Harris to teach, discipline, and perform gender norms for future generations of Mormons.*