

fications and indignation at Mormon raids and Young's declaration of martial law. Nevertheless, it was ambiguous about the state of rebellion in Utah and, in a stunning omission, failed to mention the Mountain Meadows Massacre. Young's address omitted any reference to the presence of a newly sworn governor at Fort Bridger, the mobilization of the Nauvoo Legion, the Mountain Meadows Massacre that it had committed, and his own proclamation of martial law. Remarkably, Young's message—read to the legislature by the legion's adjutant general—mentioned the army then wintering on Utah's northeastern border as simply a "rumor" (488). The volume ends with documents bearing on the Christmas discussions between Kane and Buchanan and with Kane setting off for New York where he would embark on a steamship for Panama, then to cross the Isthmus, land at San Pedro, California, and start overland for Salt Lake City. The phrasing of the letters he carried from President Buchanan make clear that Kane was acting on his own, but at the same time—and ever after—there have been commentators more than willing to assert that he was indeed a government agent.

For all its virtues, the book is not perfect. For a volume of this significance and complexity, the index is sadly inadequate. At one point I tried to locate references to the alleged tampering with Indian allegiances by the Mormons, but the entry for "Indian-Mormon relations" consists of thirty-seven page numbers with no subtopics, making it essentially useless. Furthermore, by my calculation, a fifth of the text is footnotes—866 in all—many of which contain intriguing anecdotes or other information that I expect to want to locate in the future, but they are not indexed. I hope in a future reprinting of this volume, this deficiency will be rectified, for without a comprehensive index, the value of the book is unnecessarily diminished.

I highly recommend this "sprawling," exciting, and well-written documentary history. I eagerly await Part 2.

Scry Me a River

George B. Handley. *Home Waters: A Year of Recompenses on the Provo*

River. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010. 236 pp. Paper: \$24.95; ISBN 978-1607810230

Reviewed by Rob Fergus

Terry Tempest Williams saved my life. As a BYU undergraduate suffering from late winter doldrums back in 1993, I heard her claim that you don't really know your own place if you don't know the local birds. She had no idea, but she had just slapped defibrillator paddles on my heart. I was a long-time birder but hadn't been birding for months. The next day I skipped class on a hare-brained quest to find a northern shrike in the frozen steppes of the Skull Valley Indian Reservation. Fortune smiled upon me, and I not only survived my trek across hazardous and poorly plowed West Desert gravel roads, but I found my bird sitting on a barbed wire fence miles from nowhere. I spent nearly every day of the next year searching for birds throughout Utah, including most of the canyons, trails, and backroads in Utah and Heber valleys.

I don't get back to Utah very often these days, so I was excited and anxious to read George Handley's meditations on a year spent exploring my old stomping grounds along the Provo River. Before picking up *Home Waters*, I fancied myself an intrepid geographical, ecological, and spiritual explorer. I reveled in Joseph Smith's counsel that "the things of God are of deep import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out" and that in order to find salvation, our minds "must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity."¹ *Home Waters* called my self-assessment into question by exposing my impatience, lack of care, shallowness, and unwillingness to stretch and ponder.

I wasn't four pages into the first chapter when I found myself frustrated. By the end of the book, I had followed Handley through twelve chapters and numerous explorations of the Provo River from its headwaters to its terminus in Utah Lake, and even to the far reaches of the Great Salt Lake, but Handley's river barely resembled the Provo River I know and love. We had walked the same trails, explored the same canyons, and climbed the same mountains, but somehow it seemed we inhabited different plan-

ets. I was hoping to reconnect with dippers, pygmy owls, moose, and mountain lions, but was disappointed to find precious little about these old friends in *Home Waters*. I put down the book in frustration.

Then I recalled sitting bewildered and confused in the celestial room after my first time through the temple and how my inspired mother immediately ushered me into a second endowment session, where I was able to relax, enjoy, and appreciate much of what I had missed my first time through. So I picked up *Home Waters* again and began to see how much I had missed and failed to contemplate in my initial reading. There is clearly much here that time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find out!

As Handley makes clear in the prologue, *Home Waters* seeks “to use the literary imagination as a vehicle for exploring the uniqueness of a Mormon relationship to land” (xv) and in doing so, to “tap the potential of Mormonism to inspire better stewardship in the interest of all communities in the West” (xiv). In addition, Handley sees “this essay as an exercise in thinking like a river” (xv), an allusion to Aldo Leopold’s classic essay in which he uses the metaphor of thinking like a mountain to explore the connections between all the forms of life that make up an ecological community. This is where I became initially frustrated. Handley confesses that he is “no naturalist” (4); and for a work of nature writing, *Home Waters* seemed light on ecology and heavy on personal narrative and literary allusion. However, as with my previous experience as an unprepared initiate, my expectations had clouded my ability to see the emotional and spiritual components of the landscape Handley was trying to convey through metaphor and a more literary imagination.

In recounting his hikes and fishing experiences along the Provo River, Handley is clearly describing a lone and dreary world, or as he puts it, a “strange, wild world” (63) that can swallow up unwitting hikers and tragic young campers who wander off, never to be found again. The animals I hoped to encounter are missing because Handley—and the rest of us to a greater or lesser degree—are alienated from other creatures in this fallen world. Fish, marmots, and birds make brief appearances; but from our fallen perspective, most animals have symbolically, if

not quite entirely, retreated “to the higher reaches of the surrounding mountains” (119). In the valleys, the river, heavily modified by dams, irrigation, and other civil engineering projects, is a pale ecological shadow of what it once was. Outdoor enjoyments are a guilty pleasure, occasional hours of “stolen moments” (11) away from family and other responsibilities.

Handley, in his “unnatural East of Eden state” (34), is a twenty-first-century Adam, if not naked, at least highly exposed in his struggles with guilt, separated by his own thoughts from the nature he seeks, haunted by weaknesses and youthful indiscretions, along with the insecurities of marriage and life as a privileged middle-class academic. Frequently exploring the outdoors with friends and family, he is still painfully alone, “blind,” searching for solace in nature where “the veil of the world is thinner” while “always yearning to push through the surface of what I see, to feel a hand on the other side” (67).

This world alienated from nature is one I initially resisted and didn’t want to confront. I wanted to sprint past this perplexing world to the greater light and knowledge promised to gospel seekers, to a perhaps terrestrial world where humans and nature are in harmony, or to a blissful celestial realm. What I failed to appreciate is that only “after many days” in his fallen state is Adam given the heavenly truths he needs to obtain a better world (Moses 5:6). As Joseph Smith intimated, this takes some time; and Handley invites us to join him in exploring and pondering the highs and lows of our current home in this fallen world. Through the recounting of personal and historic narratives, as well as examinations of Mormon scripture and theology, Handley exposes us to the highs of exquisite natural beauty including stunning vistas from atop Mount Nebo, and lows that include peering into uncomfortable historical episodes, and the darkest abyss of death. In a world of opposition in all things, Handley explores with us Wallace Stevens’s claim that “death is the mother of all beauty” (169).

In pondering “death’s abyss” (143), Handley plunges us into a world haunted by the specter of suicide. We witness his brother’s self-inflicted gunshot wound when Handley was in high school, the fatal leap from the subsequently eponymous Squaw Peak by the wife of murdered Timpanogots warrior Old Elk after being driven from Utah Valley by Mormon settlers, and the suicidal im-

pulses of anarchists wishing to liberate nature from the ravages of modern humanity, which in turn seems set on destroying itself and its environment through carelessness if not willful ignorance of our ecological constraints. It is a dark journey, with much that we might wish to avoid. But as Handley writes, acknowledgment is the first step in repentance—the very doctrine revealed to Adam, and which we all must follow as individuals, and as a society, if we wish to be free from the horrors of our own making.

But all is not darkness and woe. From our vantage point within this fallen world, we can look back to Eden, as well as forward to healing and atonement—for ourselves, our society, and the entire creation. Looking back—be it through Handley’s account of Spanish explorations or later Mormon settlement—we realize that there was always a snake in Eden, ecological and social sins that helped bring about our current state, alongside bountiful opportunities for growth and joy. Looking forward, we are given promises and revealed truths that can bring us into a terrestrial world of millennial peace, as well as a final celestial world where the earth is “a great seer stone, which means that nothing, no one person, brother, sister, son or daughter, no animal or stone, is lost” (122). This earth, including Handley’s Wasatch Mountains and Provo River, either once was or will eventually—perhaps even simultaneously—be an Edenic, telestial, terrestrial, and celestial world. It is also a world of spirits, and Handley acknowledges and ponders the voices and visitations of ancestors and loved ones now departed. *Home Waters* does not present a traditional ecology of place but anticipates a Mormon ecology of multiple and not quite separate worlds, while providing important signposts to help us through “our strange pilgrimage in this land” (187).

Ecological restoration is one of these important though frequently neglected pathways to atonement and environmental healing, which we can bring about through the creation, or more accurately a re-creation, of a better world. As Handley, quoting Isaiah 34 and 35, makes clear, when it comes to the world we inhabit, we get what we deserve; our “just desserts” are our ecological recompenses. If we defile the land, we become defiled as well. In a fallen world where we have frequently appropriated the bounty of nature to rule with blood and horror to the detriment of each other—not to mention the other species which share our world—“ecological

restoration is neither technophilia nor antihuman escapism. It is repentance, plain and simple” (xiii).

Only after staring our present condition in the face—seeing for once our true state and becoming “morally chastened”—are we able at last to move forward toward a terrestrial world, where we can take “action guided by the best knowledge we can find” as well as “by the highest principles of accountability to the gift of life” (208) in order to enjoy the recompenses of higher laws that include ecological harmony. Only then, after withdrawing our puny arm trying to turn the Missouri—or the Provo—River from its decreed course (D&C 121:33), will the Latter-day Saints be able to enjoy the knowledge—including vast troves of scientific knowledge—that the Almighty is pouring down from heaven. Then it will be time to move beyond what Handley calls “the substance of my dreaming” to begin “naming again” the creatures of the earth (208), to leave behind the provincialism of our lone and dreary world, and to enter a realm where we can enjoy an “awareness of the staggering size and diversity of the more-than-human community of nature” (42).

While *Home Waters* was not what I expected it to be, it turned out to be something much more—an exploration of not just a cherished landscape, but of our current place in eternity. As I re-read with a softened heart, my mind was stretched and my soul was renewed. I know I will be returning to this book again and again. The margins of my copy are full of notes and cross-references that I scribbled while my mind was stretching beyond the Wasatch to approach the utmost heavens, contemplating dark abysses, and wondering at the broad expanse of eternity. Reading it, I was alternately humbled, heartbroken, and amazed, and most important of all, brought to a closer communion—not just with the landscapes of the Provo River, but with their Creator.

Note

1. Joseph Smith Jr. et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev. (6 vols., 1902–12, Vol. 7, 1932; rpt., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980 printing): 3:295.