

Searching For Sally

Virginia Kerns. *Sally in Three Worlds: An Indian Captive in the House of Brigham Young*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2021. 288 pp. Paperback: \$34.95. ISBN: 9781647690151.

Reviewed by Jenny Hale Pulsipher

Over the long history of the genre, most biographies have been written about elite white men. There is a practical reason for that: the wealth and status of those subjects made them far more likely than other people to be literate, to have access to the materials needed to create written records, and to have descendants preserve them. Historians who wish to write about women, people of color, or people with little or no wealth face considerable challenges, even today, and have to approach their task with creativity and persistence. In her biography of Sally Young Kanosh, author Virginia Kerns has done just that.

Sally, a Pahvant Ute captive purchased by Latter-day Saint settlers and taken into Brigham Young's household as a servant in 1849, left no written records (she could neither read nor write) and only a few traces in the records left by others. Those few people who recounted her life distorted or reframed it for their own purposes. To find the real Sally, Kerns, an anthropologist by training, undertook a metaphorical dig, exposing the accumulated layers of legend and situating Sally in the context of her three worlds—her Native homeland, her longtime residence in the Lion and Beehive Houses, and her return to her Native people as a “civilized” woman.

In her introduction, Kerns declares her belief that her “ethno-narrative style” can “reveal the complexity of individuals’ lived experience: the links between their inner and outer lives, and the cultural perceptions and interpretations that influenced their emotions and actions”

(2). In addition, she asserts that the story of Sally's life can serve as a "particular case that stands for a general process," enabling us to see "how people living in American civilization have represented and treated what they regard as wild" (2). Kerns returns to this theme throughout the book; it is impossible to miss, particularly in the epilogue ("The Telling"), which discusses the ways Sally's story was framed after her death as an example of the triumph of civilization over wildness.

Kerns uses the dichotomy between "civilized" (or "tame") and "wild" to reflect how white settlers perceived themselves in opposition to their Native American neighbors, eschewing the frequently used but offensive pairing of "civilized" with "savage." Kerns argues that Sally herself adopted the tame/wild dichotomy over her decades living in Young's household. Seeing herself as civilized in opposition to her biological kin made returning to live among the Utes after her marriage to Pahvant chief Kanosh a painful exile.

The reader might ask: how do we know that this exile was painful for Sally? Indeed, how do we know how she felt about anything? That is the crux of the dilemma for this or any biography in which the subject left no personal account. Kerns has to get at Sally's experience in a roundabout way, through historical context (the events that happened to her or around her and the experiences of people who shared her circumstances) and by reading between the lines of those who mention her.

While Kerns succeeds in providing a case study illuminating how settler-colonists viewed and treated someone they considered "wild," Sally the individual remains largely enigmatic in these pages. Accessing the inner life of one's subject is a tall order even for a biographer whose subject left extensive personal writings; it may be impossible for someone like Sally, despite Kerns's best efforts. She clearly gave long and hard thought to Sally's inner life, examined a vast number of sources, and used imagination and an engaging style in her writing and structure. But without Sally's own words, we are left only with what

people (including Kerns) have projected onto her—resentment, joy, satisfaction, longing. Surely, she did feel these human emotions, but no one seems to have known her well enough to give us an intimate view. That itself is a comment on Sally's isolation as a woman living between worlds.

While we don't get a reliable intimate view of Sally Young Kanosh, Kerns deserves kudos for what she has accomplished here: a beautifully written, thought-provoking history of settler colonialism (a current theoretical approach in Indigenous studies) in Utah Territory, personalized through the multiple perspectives she gleans from a host of personal narratives. For context on Sally's Native world, Kerns relies heavily on the ethnographic descriptions of John Wesley Powell, who traveled through Utah and observed the Pahvant Utes during Sally's lifetime. For Sally's sojourn in "the heart of civilization" Kerns draws on a multitude of settler accounts and perspectives. I use the term "perspectives" in addition to "accounts" because Kerns imaginatively narrates the experiences of people who moved in Sally's orbit but left no accounts of their own. So, in the process of exploring Sally's life, the reader gets acquainted with a multitude of people who lived in or passed through the territory, from well-known figures like Zina D. H. Young to more obscure ones like Elijah Barney Ward and his Shoshone wife, also named Sally.

These many perspectives allow Kerns to construct a richly detailed description of Sally's various worlds, but they also provide a fairly comprehensive overview of the history of Utah Territory from 1849 until Sally's death in 1878. We learn about the arrival of the settler-colonists, their initial interactions with Native Utes and Shoshones, and their response to finding themselves in the middle of an active Indigenous/European slave trade in Native women and children, including the Pahvant Ute woman who is the subject of this book. Through the perspectives of the cast of characters Kerns lists in her appendix, we also see the way the settlers' need for land for their burgeoning population

shaped relations with Native people, and how violence and political conflicts reverberated in the lives of those sheltered in the “mansions” of Salt Lake City as well as those directly in harm’s way.

In *Sally in Three Worlds*, Virginia Kerns has provided an overview of nineteenth-century Utah Territory that foregrounds Native American people, and that is a significant accomplishment. It is valuable to read this oft-told story from an unexpected perspective, despite the limitations imposed by the sources. While readers may not truly get to *know* Sally, they will learn everything it is possible to know *about* her. And they will get a very good sense of the worlds that she inhabited.

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Joseph Smith’s History: It’s Complicated

Ronald O. Barney. *Joseph Smith: History, Methods, and Memory*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2020. 423 pp. Paper: \$40.00. ISBN: 978-1607817550.

Reviewed by Samuel B. Hislop

Joseph Smith defined truth as a “knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 93:24, emphasis added).

I remember well the first time I learned that I did not know nearly as much as I thought I did about things “as they were” in the life of the prophet. In October 2017, I was writing a piece for the Church’s