

Finding God in the Desert: The Landscape of Belief in Three Modern Mormon Classics

Michael Austin
Shepherd College, West Virginia

It's strange how deserts turn us into believers. I believe in walking in a landscape of mirages, because you learn humility. I believe in living in a land of little water because life is drawn together. And I believe in the gathering of bones as a testament to spirits that have moved on. -Terry Tempest Williams, *Refuge* 148

I

As Mormon scholar Hugh Nibley writes in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (1988), “The desert has two faces. It is a place of both death and of refuge, of defeat and victory, a grim coming down from Eden and yet a sure escape from the wicked world” (148). Long before the Mormon pioneers sought refuge in the heart of the Great Basin, they inherited from their Puritan ancestors this powerful and problematic typology of the desert. It was powerful because the Puritan mind saw the narratives of the Bible as the literal and metaphorical contexts in which their own lives would play out—and a tremendous number of biblical narratives occur against the backdrop of the deserts of Sinai and Judea. But the desert imagery in the Bible is

deeply ambiguous, and, as Roderick Nash documents in his landmark book *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1968), its typological significance for American Protestants has always been contradictory and difficult to pin down (13–22). On the one hand, the desert sometimes represents a place of refuge and revelation: it harbored the children of Israel when they fled from bondage in Egypt, and it provided the landscape where Moses received both the vision of the Burning Bush and the Law that still governs the Jewish religion today. On the other hand, the same desert that began as a sanctuary for the Israelites became their scourge, as they were forced by their own unbelief to wander through the “waste howling wilderness” (Deut. 32:10) for forty years as a punishment for their discontentment and unbelief, until all but two of their original number had died. These conflicting typologies extend into the New Testament. It is in the desert that John the Baptist conducts his ministry and baptizes Jesus, and it is into the desert that Jesus goes to fast for forty days and commune with God. But it is also in the desert that Satan comes to tempt him, suggesting the desert, at least to some, as a metaphor for spiritual vulnerability.

Some of the most negative nineteenth-century connotations of the wilderness grew out of the physical necessity of taming it, but many of them also stem from the Calvinist belief in a fallen natural world in which “wilderness” operates as a counterpoint to “Eden” and everything good. But the first generation of Mormons had less reason than almost any of their contemporaries to view the wilderness in this way. From its inception, the Mormon movement rejected the doctrines of original sin and total depravity—the theological bases for the perception of untamed land as fallen and in need of redemption. Furthermore, early Mormons preached that the earth was an intelligent being with its own soul, that it had been baptized by the Flood, and that it “groaned and the rocks were rent at the crucifixion of Jesus” (Owens 223–24). The early Mormon appreciation for the desert can be seen in the opening chapters of the Book of Mormon, in which the prophet Lehi leads his family into the desert in order to avoid the coming captivity in Babylon, much as Moses led his people to the promised land to escape captivity in Egypt. Here, as in Exodus, the desert is both a place of phys-

ical and spiritual refuge that nurtures the people and prepares them for their journey to another promised land and a place of revelation where Nephi and Lehi receive some of the most compelling visions that occur in any book of scripture. But the deep ambiguities that pervade the biblical account of the desert exile do not appear in the Book of Mormon. Though nearly all of those who accompany Lehi into the desert murmur from time to time, they all survive the wilderness and arrive at the promised land alive, and the reader generally understands their desert sojourn as a necessary part of their spiritual development.

But nineteenth-century Mormons did not have long to consider the typology of the desert as an abstract theological notion. In 1847, only seventeen years after the founding of the Church, the Mormons were forced to make an exodus of their own—from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the Salt Lake Valley—and to build their religion in a landscape with uncanny similarities to the Dead Sea basin so prominent in the Bible. The parallels were obvious to everyone, and the Latter-day Saints, who had sincerely believed that their earlier home in Missouri had been the actual location of the Garden of Eden, soon began to see their new home as a literal extension of the biblical Holy Land. The scripture that motivated the Mormons more than any other was Isaiah 35:1: “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.” Consequently, making the desert blossom as a rose became almost a matter of official policy; the phrase is repeated in journal after journal, speech after speech, and book after book. Furthermore, they did it. Within a relatively short period of time, one of the most arid and inhospitable areas of the country became a bastion of agriculture, industry, and organization. This flowering, a tribute to a people who were unified by their faith and their vision, should be celebrated as such, but it did not come without a cost. For, in the process of making the desert blossom like a rose—which was certainly a physical and a practical necessity for a people who had been chased into the desert against their will—many early Mormons forgot something important from their own theology: deserts can be places of refuge, revelation, and communion with the divine.

As a result of this long and continuing period of desert conquest there has emerged a divide in Mormon thought between its theological roots, which perceive the untamed desert more positively than does almost any other belief system in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and its contemporary orthodoxy, which has grown to see the ability to redeem the desert from its “desertness” as a sign of God’s love, and which can be intensely suspicious of anyone with even a hint of an environmentalist agenda. Against the perspective of this ambivalence three recent texts by Mormon writers, Judith Freeman’s *The Chinchilla Farm* (1989), Phyllis Barber’s *And the Desert Shall Blossom* (1991), and Terry Tempest Williams’s *Refuge* (1991), merit close attention. Each of these writers was reared in or near the desert, each was reared Mormon, and each is often perceived as being outside the mainstream of acceptable Mormon thought. Ironically, however, one of the most important threads uniting them is a typically Mormon fascination with the desert as a place for spiritual regeneration, divine revelation, and healing, making the desert landscape the primary backdrop against which they or their characters construct an essentially, if not institutionally, Mormon identity for themselves or their protagonists.

II

Judith Freeman’s first novel, *The Chinchilla Farm*, documents the spiritual journey of a protagonist who has rejected Mormonism and must find something else to put in its place. The novel is divided into three sections, each of which depicts a different physical location and a different set of spiritual values: “Utah,” “Los Angeles,” and “Mexico.” Verna’s spiritual journey is not linear but dialectical: after her Mormon husband leaves her for another woman, she leaves the insular, stifling culture of Utah and moves to Los Angeles, where she is exposed to the energy and culture of a big city. Ultimately, though, the materialism, pretension, and immorality of Los Angeles prove just as stifling to her as the hypocrisy and hyper-morality of Utah previously had, and she undertakes another journey, this time to the Mexican badlands, where, in the absence of both Utah’s parochial religious val-

ues and Los Angeles's pretentious materialism, Verna is able to explore alternate definitions of spirituality without fear of reproof, to retain what is valuable from both previous legs of her journey, and to forge what the author herself has called a "mutually redemptive" community with three other characters who accompany her: Inez, her former sister-in-law; Cristabel, Inez's retarded daughter by Verna's deceased brother; and Deluth, a homeless man whom Inez picked up as a hitchhiker in Utah and reencountered when he was living on the streets of Los Angeles.¹ Comprising the novel's spiritual center, the four set out on what is supposed to be a one-week trip to help Inez escape her abusive American husband Jim and live with her brother Lorenzo in the great Vizcaino desert of Baja California. The actual details of the plot from this point on are quite exciting, if sordid, but the primary focus of the novel is not on plot but, rather, on the relationships that Verna forms with three characters even more economically and spiritually marginalized than herself. As a result of their interactions throughout the last third of the novel, all emerge from the Mexican journey more spiritually aware and more connected to humanity than they were before. In Verna's case, this sense of spiritual connection leads to her transforming epiphany in a small Catholic church in the middle of the desert:

Something came over me then. I felt a transforming lightness, as if I were not only myself but of the same substance as all that was around me, encased in something that was the same as the young man up in front, the same as Inez, the same as the flame of the candle and the waxy flowers, the wooden Christ. It was a good feeling of not being separate and alone anymore. For a long time I simply felt these things. What if it were possible to believe, I thought, in something other than the random and faithful sequence of events? (284)

Of importance in the novel is the way that it maps its spiritual values

¹Freeman uses the term "mutually redemptive" to describe the relationship formed between the main characters in her novels in an as yet unpublished

onto the external landscape. In the first section, Mormon culture is portrayed as hostile, sterile, and oppressive—the spiritual equivalent to the desert, or the “miles of empty, poisonous earth” it springs from (60). When Verna escapes to Los Angeles, she is thus fleeing both the landscape and the culture, and for essentially the same reasons: they are both oppressive and stifling. Once in Southern California, however, she discovers that she is still in a desert. Spiritually, “Los Angeles” is just as barren as “Utah”; behind the urban sophistication of her big-city friends, Verna discovers all of the insularity and parochialism of Utah in fancier clothes. This realization, of course, corresponds to a topographical reality: Los Angeles, lying on the westernmost edge of the Mojave desert, receives an average of only twelve inches of rain a year and supports both its population and its image of prosperity through the massive redirection of water from other sources. Its resourceful landscape, like its sophistication, is an illusion.

In Verna’s journey to a third desert, she consciously chooses to go further into the desert landscape—the same kind of landscape she had once tried to reject. Her spiritual journey follows a similar path: in this undeveloped and undefiled desert she forms the human connections that constitute the novel’s spiritual center, and in a small desert church she experiences the great moment of transcendence that enables her to understand the shape of her spiritual journey: “From Utah to Los Angeles to Mexico I had come. The farther south, the clearer the light, the brighter the color, the more the feeling of age-old mystery settled on everything like a subtle vibration” (285). The topographical landscape of *The Chinchilla Farm* never changes: Verna spends the entire novel in different variations of a desert landscape. The spiritual landscape, however, changes dramatically as Verna learns to accept what is good and beautiful about the desert rather than focusing only on what is stifling and oppressive.

The question to consider, then, is whether the moral position that Freeman’s characters finally develop can be called, in any way, “Mormon”? Freeman, who does not consider herself religiously Mormon, has said that it can. In her interview with Bryan Waterman, Freeman acknowledged “that the moral universe her novels inhabit owes its ex-

istence to her Mormon background,” and that each of her books centers on a “mutually redemptive” relationship between marginalized individuals because “part of her Mormon childhood included a very real sense that human beings had the responsibility to take care of each other.” This is not, of course, to suggest that such redemption becomes religious in a traditional or institutional sense. The religion that Freeman constructs for her heroine is based on relative truths, continual searching, and, most of all, human connectedness, although as Verna reassesses her perception of the desert landscape, she must also reevaluate her perception of the landscape of belief. While she stands in the desert church, Verna finally recognizes the need that all human beings have for spiritual nourishment and the role that organized religions (which she continues to reject in her own life) can play in the nourishing process:

I thought, if there were a church like this near me, I might go to it often. Wouldn't that be funny, if I got religion again one day?

Then I realized that it wasn't that; I would never become a Catholic, or anything else. It was simply this: I saw the truth of what Inez had said, about how in church you could get a feeling that everything was going to be okay even when it wasn't. What a lovely, beautiful deception. . . . We are drawn to the flickering hope, imagining that within these reverent spheres something might be mended. (285)

What this passage suggests is that there is a confluence of two general patterns in Freeman's work: the acceptance of the desert as a physical landscape capable of becoming a site for negotiating spiritual values, and the acceptance of at least some recognizable aspects of her own religious and cultural heritage as the starting point for that negotiation. These two patterns imply each other. When Freeman writes that “there is no landscape like the landscape of childhood, terrain at once vivid and hauntingly vague” (28), her words could apply equally to the physical or spiritual landscapes of her native Utah. Both seemed harsh and sterile to Verna when she set out for Los Angeles,

but she ultimately recognizes their intrinsic beauty and worth.

III

In her essay “The Precarious Walk Away from Mormonism, All the Time with a Stitch in My Side,” Phyllis Barber tells of her largely unsuccessful attempt to step outside of her Mormon identity: “After thirty-eight years of dedication and every-meeting, ever[ly]-church-job devotion to Mormonism, I decided, through a strange, broken and knotted and knotted and broken again thread of events, that it was necessary and compulsory to find my way to God by myself” (122). Barber relates her travels throughout the world, seeking spiritual insights from any source that offered them and, more often than not, finding them. But she soon discovers that one’s religious identity cannot be easily shed: “As I first walked from west to east, so to speak, from Mormonism to the exploration of the other, I thought it possible to walk away from the roots that held and succored me. But how long can one travel east before it becomes west again?” (122).

The answer to this question can be found in Barber’s major novel, *And the Desert Shall Blossom*. In it Barber tells the story of her main character’s spiritual journey against the backdrop of one of the most laudable engineering projects—and one of the most egregious intrusions into the landscape—of all time: the construction of the Hoover Dam. Set between 1930 and 1935, the novel weaves factual history about the dam’s construction with the fictional narrative of Alf and Esther Jensen, a Mormon couple who move from Utah to Nevada, desperately seeking employment and excited to participate in the construction of the modern world’s next unnatural wonder. The novel’s title immediately suggests the parallel between the dam builders in Nevada in 1930 and the Mormon pioneers who entered a similar desert eighty years earlier with the same basic mission: to redeem the desert from its natural sterility, making it both useful to man and acceptable to God. *And the Desert Shall Blossom* is a well-researched historical novel about human achievement—about a community of dreamers who conquer nature and tame both the Colorado River and

the Nevada desert. But it also tells the story of the river's pain and the land's plight; and it is a story about the spiritual damage that people inflict when they declare nature their enemy and shut themselves off from the very natural world that should be their refuge.

During the novel, Esther becomes more and more closely identified with the Colorado River, and through her pain Barber examines the spiritual cost of making the desert blossom. Esther's character cannot be easily reduced to stereotypes. Badly burned by a childhood accident, she is scarred and embarrassed about her body, but she is also a strong and talented woman who is committed to her religion and devoted to her family. For much of the novel, her spirituality is defined entirely by her participation in the Mormon Church, and as a result she becomes increasingly alienated from her much less faithful husband Alf, who both resents her harsh orthodoxy and fears her quiet strength. Throughout the novel, each successful human encroachment on the natural course of the river corresponds to a distinct stage in the decline of Esther's spiritual strength. While the river is still strong, she approaches it with a sense of awe and respect, wondering "if God lived in the river because it never stopped flowing and God couldn't be trapped" (42). Soon after this, Esther saves a young child who had been tied up and abandoned in the desert by his own father, and she consecrates her relationship with the river in a baptismal scene with important implications for the remainder of the story:

Cupping her fingertips into the water, she sprinkled several drops on his face and on her face. "I baptize you to new life, boy. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, I baptize you, me, and I baptize Alf who needs a new start, too. We're all forgiven. We're all new. Unblemished lambs for God."

"A mighty fortress is our God," Esther sang out suddenly. "A tower of strength ne'er failing." Her contralto voice was a rich copy of her mother's against the panorama of spare branches . . . in the church of the open sky accompanied by the sound of the Colorado River and an occasional explosion. (56)

The “occasional explosions,” though, become more and more frequent as civilization, in the form of a hydroelectric dam, comes to the “church of the open sky.” Soon after construction on the dam begins, Esther’s family starts to fall apart, and Alf begins to spend most of his time with a seductive widow named Serena Bishop. On the very day that the engineers successfully divert the flow of the river, Esther, overlooking the dam site, laments, “‘look what they’ve done to my beautiful river’” (200), and declares her hatred for her husband in a dramatic public scene that causes her to be committed to a mental hospital. Esther’s prayer the night before she is committed foreshadows her later perception of how connected the progression of her life is to the flow of the Colorado: “*Oh father. . . . Save me. Save me. Where is your promised land? Everything’s water and fire. Flooding and burning, dry land that burns, water that never stops. And there’s this dam in Black Canyon. Built to trap water that needs to flow. How insane!*” (211). In a letter to her son Herbert she writes, “Even up here in Sparks, I can feel the concrete being poured into that dam. I can feel it in my veins. Things are closing in, stopping up my arteries. I don’t want to be dammed up anymore. I want my freedom” (221). But as the dam nears completion, something remarkable happens to Esther. Rather than withering away and dying, as she seemed to imagine she would when the river was finally subdued, she realizes that both she and the river are eternal beings who cannot be permanently affected by earthly restraints. In what is supposed to be her crowning moment, Esther is released from the mental hospital and selected to sing the “Star-Spangled Banner” at the dam’s dedication, but when the time for her performance comes, she refuses, telling her son “simply and plainly” that “this dam won’t last anyway, so why should I sing for it? Thou shalt not worship false idols, don’t you remember? Trust not in the arm of flesh” (277). The novel’s closing epiphany can be read as both Esther’s own closing interior monologue and also the defiant words the Colorado River speaks to its temporary subduers:

It is cool and dark here though I can see the sunlight as it filters through the silt and green pearl liquid above me. I can relax now.

Me. I am water. Every time I hit against a slab of sandstone, it won't hurt me. I'll leap up, spraying into a fan of liquid crystal and fall back into the current where I glide over boulders, abysses, and cliffs. Undifferentiated. Flowing over the rocks. No one can take anything away from me because I'm carried by the flow that's rushing to the Pacific where everything begins. I'm so cool here. . .

Nothing can stop me now. I am water. If they put me in a cup, I'll evaporate. If they hold me in their hands, I'll slip through their fingers. It is cool and dark here with my river. Smooth over flat rocks. Fingers of water splitting into channels, finding new paths. There's always a way through. (280–81)

This final resolution echoes part of the novel's epigraph from ancient Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu, "How can a man's life keep its course / If he will not let it flow" (qtd. in Barber, *Blossom* [iv]). And indeed, the novel invokes a number of Eastern religious concepts—especially from Taoism and Sufism—in its renegotiation of spiritual norms. These Eastern doctrines of noninterference and essential oneness with the divine provide an important counterpoint to Mormon culture's emphasis on making deserts bloom. But Esther herself does not reject the God she has always known; rather, she embraces Him wholly, as she tells her husband, "I only know God is my comforter, more than you or any person. God loves me. . . . You can't hurt me anymore" (265). And for all of the Eastern flavor of Esther's final transcendence, there is something distinctly Mormon about its invocation of an eternal perspective, its emphasis on endurance to the end, and its almost pathological optimism. Esther's spiritual journey, like that of her creator, takes her so far east that it becomes west again.

IV

Terry Tempest Williams's memoir *Refuge* weaves two narratives together into one: the public narrative of the rising of the Great Salt Lake and the resulting destruction of the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, and the very private narrative of the author's mother, Diane,

dying of ovarian cancer. In both stories, Williams faces the destruction of things beautiful and natural (the bird refuge and her mother's life) by forces whose beauty and naturalness she must discover and accept before she can heal herself. Throughout *Refuge*, Williams portrays the Great Salt Lake, the destroyer of her beloved bird refuge, as something grand and magnificent that should be appreciated on its own terms and not subjected to human interference. Though she grieves for the displacement of her beloved birds, she understands that the rising of the river and the destruction of the refuge are part of natural cycles that should be respected. But the real growth of the narrator comes as she develops the ability to apply the same logic to her mother's death, to see it not only as a necessary end to life but as something beautiful and magnificent in its own right.

Embedded in these twin narratives, however, is a third equally powerful narrative of Williams's Mormon faith. Like all spiritual values in *Refuge*, Williams's Mormonism grows out of the landscape and, more specifically, the landscape of the desert:

It's strange how deserts turn us into believers. I believe in walking in a landscape of mirages, because you learn humility. I believe in living in a land of little water because life is drawn together. And I believe in the gathering of bones as a testament to spirits that have moved on.

If the desert is holy, it is because it is a forgotten place that allows us to remember the sacred. Perhaps that is why every pilgrimage to the desert is a pilgrimage to the self. There is no place to hide, and so we are found.

In the severity of a salt desert, I am brought down to my knees by its beauty. My imagination is fired. My heart opens and my skin burns in the passion of these moments. I will have no other gods before me.

Wilderness courts our souls. When I sat in church throughout my growing years, I listened to teachings about Christ in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights reclaiming his strength, where he was able to say to Satan, "Get thee hence." When I

imagined Joseph Smith kneeling in a grove of trees as he received his vision to create a new religion, I believed their sojourns into nature were sacred. Are ours any less? (148)

Two aspects of this passage echo positions Williams takes throughout *Refuge*: first, she draws her spiritual metaphors for the desert from both Mormon and Christian sources because Mormon Christianity lies at the heart of how she understands spiritual things; second, she suggests that her own spiritual sojourns are equal to those of her religion's founders, thus asserting her essential Mormonism at the same time that she refuses to allow anybody else to define that Mormonism for her. When Williams speaks of her Mormon beliefs, she almost always emphasizes her own part in constructing them. In asserting the female nature of the Holy Ghost, for example, she states: "The 'still, small voice' I was taught to listen to as a child was 'the gift of the Holy Ghost.' Today I *choose* to recognize this presence as a holy intuition, the gift of the Mother" (241). And in the masterful concluding section of the memoir, "The Clan of the One-Breasted Woman," she reserves for herself the right to "question everything" and negotiate her own place in relation to the larger community of Latter-day Saints: "What I do know, however, is that as a Mormon woman of the fifth generation of Latter-day Saints, I must question everything, even if it means losing my faith, even if it means becoming a member of a border tribe among my own people. Tolerating blind obedience in the name of patriotism or religion ultimately takes our lives" (286).

Latter-day Saint readers have often been perplexed and even offended by Williams's attempt to embrace their religion while rejecting their orthodoxy, and Mormon writers have criticized her for "challeng[ing] the religion's faith in the miraculous power of the priesthood" (Kramer 226), for "[rejecting] the ultimate Mormon woman's experience: childbirth and motherhood" (Bush 51), and even in the words of one college student for "[praying] to birds" (qtd. in Plummer 240). But while the spirituality that pervades *Refuge* runs no risk of being considered orthodox, neither could it ever be deemed anything but Mormon. Almost all of the elements in *Refuge* that contemporary Mormons would consider most unorthodox—Williams's assessment of

the socialistic organization of the United Order (99–103), her discussion of the folk-magic beliefs that animated early Mormon leaders (195–96), and her strong belief in a nurturing Mother in Heaven (241), for example—are firmly rooted in historical, if not contemporary, Mormon beliefs. Indeed, one of the most important projects of *Refuge* is to reclaim the earthy, natural, and socially progressive qualities of the Mormon faith that Williams believes have been lost in the modern Church’s attempts to accommodate itself to the capitalist, Protestant, American culture that once drove its ancestors into the desert. What Williams wants most to reclaim from historical Mormonism, however, is its historical and typological connection to the land, and, specifically, to the desert. Thus, in speaking of her Mormon ancestors who settled the Salt Lake Valley, Williams employs the language of biblical typology to discuss the desert as a refuge:

Isolation and a landscape of grit were just what the Mormons were looking for. A land that no one else wanted meant religious freedom and community building without persecution. It was an environment perfectly suited for a people unafraid of what only their hands could yield. They were a people motivated by the dream of Zion. They had found their Dead Sea and the River Jordan. The Great Basin Desert was familiar to them if not by sight at least by story. (69)

V

Gone from Williams’s discussion is the other face of the desert: the harsh, punitive scourge that must “blossom as the rose” before it can be any good to anybody. Throughout *Refuge*, Williams asserts explicitly the association among Mormonism, faith, and the desert that *The Chinchilla Farm* and *And the Desert Shall Blossom* construct implicitly. In each of these works, spirituality and religious growth are associated with the desert wilderness—not with attempts to redeem desert, but with allowing the uncontaminated desert to redeem the individual. Verna Flake, Esther Jensen, and Terry Tempest Williams all journey into the desert to

search for—and ultimately to find—understanding, refuge, and revelation. In doing so, they are following the example of three different sets of “chosen people” who did the same: the Twelve Tribes of Israel in the Bible, the family of Lehi in the Book of Mor-mon, and the pioneers in Mormon history and legend.

Though all three books occasionally present the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in a negative light, the spiritual journeys in all three are essentially Mormon because, in the first place, Mormonism is the starting point for each journey, and starting points will always influence final destinations in ways that can never be fully anticipated, and because, in the second place, Mormonism is, at its heart, a religion of both the land and the spirituality of the desert—the overt point of most of the essays in the collection *New Genesis: A Mormon Reader on Land and Community* (1998) edited by Williams, William Smart, and Gibbs Smith. In this collection, former Utah congressman Wayne Owens makes a crucial observation that seems at the heart of these authors’ attempts to reclaim something that has become deeply obscured but remains constantly present in Mormonism: “Our doctrine is enormously progressive as it relates to the environment, but our cultural interpretation has not followed suit. Our theology has not translated into a politically powerful environmental ethic. . . . Why this reticence on the part of so many to preserve God’s greatest handiwork? How can this be?” (244). For Freeman, Barber, and Williams, at least, the answer to Owens’s question is easy: it cannot be. For all three authors the key to spiritual regeneration is not to make the desert blossom as a rose but to understand, as their ancestors and the architects of their faith understood, how to appreciate the desert as a desert.

WORKS CITED

- Barber, Phyllis. *And the Desert Shall Blossom*. Salt Lake City: U of Utah P, 1991.
- . “The Precarious Walk Away from Mormonism, All the Time with a Stitch in My Side.” *Dialogue* 29 (Fall 1996): 120–29.
- Bush, Laura. “Terry Tempest Williams’s *Refuge*: Sentiments and Separation.” *Annual of the Association for Mormon Letters*. Ed. Lavina Fielding Anderson. Provo: Association for Mormon Letters, 1996. 46–51.
- Freeman, Judith. *The Chinchilla Farm*. New York: Norton, 1989.
- Kramer, Neal. “*Refuge* as Extinction: The Victory of Fear and Death over Courage and Faith.” *Annual of the Association for Mormon Letters*. Ed. Lavina Fielding Anderson. Provo: Association for Mormon Letters, 1995. 226–36.
- Nash, Roderick. *Wilderness and the American Mind*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1968.
- Nibley, Hugh. *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*. 3rd Ed. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988.
- Owens, Wayne. “Wilderness in the Hand of God.” *New Genesis: A Mormon Reader on Land and Community*. Ed. Terry Tempest Williams, William B. Smart, and Gibbs M. Smith. Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 1998. 222–27.
- Plummer, Thomas. “Is There Refuge in the Text? Narrator and Reader in Terry Tempest Williams’s Memoir.” *Annual of the Association for Mormon Letters*. Ed. Lavina Fielding Anderson. Provo: Association for Mormon Letters, 1995. 237–46.
- Waterman, Bryan. “Judith Freeman Interview.” Online posting. 22 May 1996. AML List Archives. 5 Jan 2001. <<http://cc.weber.edu/aml/archives.html>>.
- Williams, Terry Tempest. *Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place*. New York: Pantheon, 1991.