

A Fictional Account

I recommend that *Dialogue* institute a new award for achievement in fiction. It might be called the Mark Twain Award. And I would like to nominate Dan Vogel as a worthy recipient. After reading Vogel's purported rebuttal (*Letters*, Vol. 36, No. 1) to my paper "Form Criticism of Joseph Smith 1823 Vision of the Angel Moroni" (Vol. 35, No. 3), I have a discovery to report. Vogel's criticisms have nothing to do with my article or its arguments. His letter is replying, instead, to an implied article that never existed. I am flattered to be named as fictional author of this fictive work, but it would be dishonest for me to take credit. No, the credit all belongs to Dan. Let me give you just two examples of his fertile imagination.

1. In my actual paper, I argue that there is strong evidence that the scriptural citations by Moroni in Joseph Smith's 1838 account of the 1823 vision are a product of an 1830's setting and are, therefore, unlikely to have been the words in the original story and vision. Vogel attacks my work (and me) because, he says, I both argue that Joseph Smith "consciously added words" distorting the account of the vision and, at the same time, claim that Joseph Smith inadvertently inserted new scriptural wording into an old story of Moroni. In fact, my consistent position throughout the article is the latter. Who could possibly remember precise quotations after fifteen years? I am not sure why Vogel asserts that I

am claiming Joseph Smith "consciously added words." This is stated nowhere in my paper nor in anything else I have written or said. I can only chalk it up to remarkable creativity.

2. Later Vogel states that in the article I claim that the 1823 vision takes the form of a "typical evangelical vision of . . . an angel." And he uses this statement as a platform from which to attack: "[B]y no stretch of the imagination," he scolds, is the Moroni visit recounted in the form a "typical evangelical vision." Ouch! But wait a minute. If you'll read the article—my article, the one I wrote—you will find me arguing that the literary form of the 1823 vision is, in fact, a mixed one, depending on the version. It could be a money-digging narrative, or a mix of religion and money digging, a lost ancient book narrative, and so forth. The story more often than not combined multiple literary forms. In that context, I argue that Joseph Smith's 1832 version is of mixed literary form containing, among other things, "elements" from typical evangelical visions. The principal evangelical element in the 1832 account is the prayer for forgiveness of those in a state of conviction of their sins. According to the prophet in 1832, this was the reason he prayed the night of the Moroni vision. This statement is surely non-controversial for any objective historian of any religious persuasion. I am not saying that this evangelical element was the vision. I am simply stating that Joseph Smith drew from a variety of literary forms, including evangelical, in the 1832 account.

Of course, Vogel's fictional reduction of my argument is easier to argue with. . . . as is, for him, the shifty lot of visionaries in general. Faced with the evidence that there were hundreds of visionaries, prophets, and stone gazers in the early nineteenth century, indeed well beyond the nineteenth century, who had visions using techniques employed by Joseph Smith, Vogel—ever the logic master—warns that if these people cannot avoid anachronism (reinterpretation, rethinking, inconsistency), "historians have every right to suspect dishonesty." Look out Ann Lee, Teresa of Avila, Mohammed, John of the Cross, and especially poor Joseph Smith. However, the evidence is overwhelming that, for instance, Joseph Smith used traditional mystical techniques to inspire visions in the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon. Vogel himself takes that very position in his most recent book. Joseph was not faking through mimicry. His visionary techniques worked. So why in the world would he need to lie about having the 1823 vision? He, in fact, knew how to induce visions. And he did induce them. I'm afraid in these matters, I far prefer the less peevish, less clerkish views of the great scholars of mystical tradition, Pagels, Eliade, Remini, and others. I do however want to honor Dan Vogel's gift for improvisation. He still has my vote for the Mark Twain Fiction Award.

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Before Adam All Die

I noted in the *Dialogue* articles on "Evil Evolution" (Vol. 35, No. 4) that the most often mentioned disparity be-

tween the evolutionist's and the religionist's view of creation is pre-Adamic death. Evolution could not have evolved these billions of years without the elimination of the unfit, and yet religion is reluctant to acknowledge death's handiwork before 4000 BC and the "fall" of Adam. ("...in Adam all die" 1 Cor 15:12). May I offer a solution to the apparent dichotomy of the two views?

Paul's letters to the Romans and Corinthians are replete with statements establishing the parity of the acts of "...the first man Adam. . ." and "...the last Adam [Christ]" (1 Cor. 15:45). Paul instructs us that Adam is "...the figure [equivalent or type] of him [Christ] that was to come. . ." (Rom 5:14). Moreover, "...since by man [Adam] came death, by man [Christ] came also the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. 15:21).

Our "latter-day" religion has revealed the doctrine that the effects of the atonement are retroactive; "...brethren be reconciled unto him [the Father] through the atonement of Christ. . .before he manifesteth himself in the flesh" (Jacob 4:11). Since the resurrection of nature is atemporal and Adam is Christ's prefigure, then what prevents the rational believer from supposing that resurrection's prerequisite "fall" is also retroactive? If not so, then how do we account for the presence of the "dreary" world of sweat and death that awaited Adam just outside the garden gate?

In my view, God-punctuated evolution produces each "world without number" and prepares on each one some fertile soil for the planting of a little garden "eastward in Eden." When all is in readiness, "the first man" is placed there to act out the timeless ordinance of "the fall" that justifies his necessary endowment

with the knowledge of good and evil. With this final endowment the gods themselves evolve.

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A Context for Change

I'll try to get serious.

I am so much in agreement with the Spring 2003 (Vol. 36, No. 1) confessions of David O. Tolman (see pp. 103-108), taking the side of science as opposed to religion.

Nevertheless, even though I side with him in his way of approaching truth, I would like to remind him that his teacher at Princeton, Thomas S. Kuhn, taught us all to observe the existence of paradigms (models or patterns of thought). My own mentor, David Potter (of Yale, then Stanford), told me that he wondered what context some future historian would clap over all of us—a context, no doubt, of which we were unaware. In the discipline of history, contexts are everything, and facts are merely illustrative.

A neighbor of mine, now dead, held a Ph.D. from Cal. Tech. He would sit in his study thinking about tools—basic tools. He sought to invent some new ones because he believed that our

technology had evolved from people tacking on improvements to existing basic tools. He thought that if we could start out with different basic tools, it would give rise to a different technology.

Is our technology “true”? As Americans we have pragmatically come to believe that whatever works is also “true.” What we should believe is that whatever works “works.” Ptolemaic astronomy can predict eclipses. Newtonian physics can put a man on the moon. In conquering the American wilderness, we invented a lot of useful things because we were ignorant of solutions used by Europeans or Asians.

In a nut shell, I am saying that science usually operates within existing and accepted constructs, many of which will be with us only temporarily, and most of which are inferior to what lies ahead.

But the great thing about science is that it stands ready to CHANGE when proven wrong or inadequate. Not so with religion. As one who set in motion the event which reduced the Book of Abraham to an absurdity, 35 years ago, I marvel that it is still up and kicking.

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