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ILLINOIS PRESS**

Review

Reviewed Work(s): WoO by Renee Angle

Review by: Kylan Rice

Source: *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, Vol. 27 (2018), pp. 240-246

Published by: University of Illinois Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/jbookmormstud2.27.2018.0240>

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It is not every day that an author has a chance to respond so quickly and so publicly to a review of her or his work. I wish to express my gratitude to Thomas for offering me this opportunity. I hope I have clarified a point or two, but most especially I hope I have made clear that Thomas has fixed on the issues in my work that seem most important to me. That gives me some confidence that I am myself interested in the right questions. That matters more to me as a philosopher and a reader than whether I give anything like the right answers to the questions. It is enough just to settle on the right questions that call for our attention.

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Renee Angle. *WoO*. Tucson, AZ: Letter Machine Editions, 2016.

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Journal of Book of Mormon Studies, vol. 27, 2018, pp. 240–246
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EXPERIMENTATION LIVES AT THE HEART of Mormon praxis. Alma encourages his followers to “experiment” on his words—to “experiment

to know.” If they follow through on Alma’s invitation, believers are able to obtain divine knowledge for themselves: empirical, positive surety is theirs for the taking. Like Alma, Moroni exhorts readers of the Book of Mormon to act in order to obtain knowledge for themselves about “the truth of all things.” Both Alma and Moroni divest themselves of epistemological responsibility, mantling it instead on the shoulders of the average individual. For Mormons, faith in and knowledge of the divine become essentially practical, applicable, and user-oriented. It is routed through the immanent, the daily, and the local.

A handful of cultural idioms have cropped up expressive of Mormon experimentalism. Invocations and benedictions for sacrament meetings or Sunday school often include the rote supplication: “Please help us apply these things to our daily lives.” Quotidian application takes a discursive turn in scripture study; Mormons are encouraged to “liken” scriptural content to themselves. Growing up in the Church, I was encouraged by teachers to swap out the specific names in the Book of Mormon, Bible, and Doctrine and Covenants with my own name. Narrative texts that featured particular biographical details relevant to Nephi or Oliver Cowdery became frameworks for personal reference. Joseph Knight became a floating signifier—a voidable vessel I could fill with myself.

Under such a pavilion, everything becomes relatable, pragmatic, and relocated to the frame of personal experience. “All things” are up for grabs. But this approach also means that all things have to be made from scratch. Nothing is, until I engage with it. As a result, I experience radical immanence; I am up to my elbows in an essential materialism. For Mormons, perhaps more so than for those of other creeds, practice is worship. As King Benjamin advises, “if you believe all these things see that ye do them” (Mosiah 4:10). Faith is doing. Things, all these things, are actions.

In *Speculative Grace: Bruno Latour and Object-Oriented Theology*,¹ the Mormon philosopher Adam Miller interprets Bruno Latour in order

1. Adam S. Miller, *Speculative Grace: Bruno Latour and Object-Oriented Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

to describe a material metaphysics consonant with Mormon materialism. Miller explains how Latour begins from the deduction that there exists in the world “an original multiplicity.” If the world is made up of many things instead of one essential absolute thing, then nothing can be totalized. With this claim, Latour avoids the reductionism that takes place (and takes the place of things) when making metaphysical generalizations, and thereby does justice to the inherent complexity of any given object. Latour seeks to ground us phenomenologically and materially in objects at hand. The truth of a thing is not ideal, but real.

Latour calls this the “principle of irreduction,” where “nothing is, by itself, either reducible or irreducible to anything else”;² objects “can’t be accounted for in advance,” but they also aren’t in and of themselves.³ Miller recapitulates and breaks apart the principle of irreduction into the two sub-concepts that define it: “Given an original multiplicity, (1) no object can be entirely reduced without remainder to any other object or set of objects, and (2) no object is *a priori* exempt from being reducible in part to any other object or set of objects.”⁴ Irreducible but multiply arrayed, objects accord in a “messy” network where constitutive interaction happens on an ontologically level playing field. In other words, “if an object exists, then it exists as the only provisional unity of an only partially compatible set of relationships.”⁵ Miller observes some of the theological consequences that attend this worldview. Where there is nothing Absolute or totally Other, otherness is multiplied. Insofar as otherness is the predicate for transcendence, transcendence is multiplied too: “Transcendence isn’t lost when the One is banned, it multiplies like loaves and fishes. Blessed, divided, and shared, transcendence is more real, substantial, and ubiquitous than it has ever been—but the price is its purity. The hands of the multitude are dirty.”⁶ As Miller elaborates in more colorful terms, “the principle of irreduction is nothing

2. Miller, *Speculative Grace*, 37.

3. Miller, *Speculative Grace*, 38.

4. Miller, *Speculative Grace*, 38.

5. Miller, *Speculative Grace*, 39.

6. Miller, *Speculative Grace*, 44.

if not an industrial-grade blender that emulsifies heaven and earth, the global and the local, the human and the nonhuman, into a single, messy, metaphysical pulp.”⁷ As a result, transcendence, especially the transcendence of grace, becomes material, relational, real, hands-on, intimate, and, above all, immanent. Applied to Mormonism, Miller offers an “experimental” metaphysical account of the immanence so central to Latter-day Saint praxis.

The messy, networked immanence of Miller’s metaphysical materialism is also one way of conceptualizing Renee Angle’s *WoO*, a poetic emulsification of heaven, earth, and Mormonism in the industrial-grade blender of language. In her inflection of one kind of Mormon experience, Angle levels the transcendent, the occult, the sacred, the material, heretical, cultural, personal, physical, banal, and obscene into a polyglottal smorgasbord of prose poetry. Nothing is not up for grabs:

Nashing men necklace an abacus of each new rule. But trees to pulp and place as a poultice for poverty. Which means nightgowns hover over the mouths of every should. Through a crotch rot cemetery, after bathing suits kept on all day, a new skin safer. Inside a child a softer bomb. A nautilus, one man’s book expressed in fish. Because the rim party could descend into the canyon once they shot him. Because the ever-living liver mythifies trouble in tomb light. Off cambered backs comes bare knowledge. To split the mound like a coconut and tailor its lace. Of sorcery’s bonnet, brothers’ betrayal. (p. 22)

WoO is intentionally fragmented and fragmentary. It claims to be a reconstruction of the 116 lost pages of the Book of Mormon from fragments of biography, heritage, legend, and extant scripture. Near the end of her long introduction to the book, Angle announces, “I have reconstructed the text that follows based on these fragments. It is Joseph Smith’s *WoO*, *Werke ohne Opuszahl*. My title is derived from a German catalogue listing used to denote musical compositions surviving only as fragments” (p. 16). The acronym *WoO* evokes another: *OOO*,

7. Miller, *Speculative Grace*, 42.

denoting the Object-Oriented Ontological tradition in which Latour and Miller engage. To compare *WoO* and *OOO* is productive, I believe, since Angle foregrounds material and texture, aggregating the discursive debris of life imbricated in Mormon culture and hailed by its history: “Krill bashed her squash blossom necklace, but enter Hofmann’s & ‘Thou may’est see the burn marks yet.’ ‘Thou may’est’ papyri-sty climb. Bald headed cap swim. Benson excommunicato staccato. Bejesus and Beelzebub filled up that O in holy. Cheating tap water of its chlorine. Kamikaze body red dot splat. With peepstone 26 beat stomata” (p. 47). Squash blossoms, necklaces, papyri, tap water, and peepstones abound. In one of her more lucid passages, Angle observes: “Objects are outside the soul, of course; and yet they are also ballast in our heads” (p. 70). No matter how idealistic in their outlook, people are conditioned by material circumstances. As part of the real world, taken as real, theology also is “intimate, messy, hands-on, [and] adaptive.”⁸ Angle’s book is messy and uncouth. For someone like Adam Miller, such messiness is essential.

Angle’s collage of discourses, time frames, and experiential textures puts her into conversation with the poets and artists of Dada. More specifically, she engages in language with the “ready-made” tradition. In the opening pages of *WoO*, where Angle gives a narratological manifesto on truth, lineage, identity, and artistic process, she screws off into a passage that shines a light onto some of her aesthetic forebears:

Of Joseph’s spiritual pursuit involving the commonplace. Sleet is what they call it though I have barely seen it. He was turning a urinal into a baptismal font. When he lost 116 pages of his original draft of *The Book of Mormon* he was ‘no good’ and said so when referring to the product of his mind. The day is about its pace. What could the alternate question be? A valise full of souvenirs, at bottom reactionary. Of course the question isn’t whether or not Joseph existed, but if he actually talked with god and ‘translated’ or ‘transcribed’ the record of Mormon, or if he readymade the story. (p. 7)

8. Miller, *Speculative Grace*, 76.

Angle's text is "ready-made" or assembled, pieced together, in the tradition of Joseph Cornell. But she also approaches her source text—and, indeed, all texts—as if ready-made. For better or worse, Angle reminds the Mormon reader of the contingent, immanent, and adaptable character of their faith tradition: "Their ornaments. Their manner of curing the sick. The burial of their dead. Their mourning for their dead. Their raising seed to a deceased brother. Their change of names adapted to their circumstances and times. Their own traditions" (p. 34). But the monoliths of tradition so often begin as *ad hoc* responses or solutions to problems. Tradition, like scripture, flows from revelation, which is prompted by circumstance. A book is a living book. Scripture is living scripture. Angle extrapolates from contingent revelation a writing process:

The text is anterior to the composition, though the composition be interior to the text. By means of the Urim and Thummim. The continual sequence of pages—the bioscopic book But the world is peopled with objects. Most religions offer a system or a few tips for exploiting the theos. There is no harm in this. . . . Grammar appeared after languages were argument. But Daddy took the lamb away. Now it's a parchment on her wall. (pp. 42–43)

Angle's two totems of adaptability and ready-made resilience include the stem cell and the amphibious (Hofmann-esque) salamander, which creeps across the book as a symbol of unfettered regeneration: "Go back and brood the back of the band, hand breed, like the salamander who can regenerate its limbs, its tail, its upper and lower jaws, the lens and retina of its eye, and its intestine. . . . What paper do I speak of?" (p. 59).

The lineaments of composition comprise a central theme of *WoO*—not only in the aesthetic as well as metaphysical material sense, in which "the world is peopled with objects," but also in more physical, even bodily terms. Angle foregrounds the body and its identity as multiple, multiplying entities. Under the big tent of object-oriented theology, the body is reaffirmed as the most important implement available for the

construction and maintenance of a workable epistemology, a practical faith. The speech and language that we use to articulate, ratify, and later act on or materialize belief is literally felt and experienced in the body: “Palpate the tongue and feel the hyloid arch within it” (p. 41). Elsewhere, Angle routes “The HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE . . . / The HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE” (p. 68). Angle acknowledges the discursive component, or “the grammar of affirmation” (p. 16), involved in realizing and maintaining any kind of knowledge, including faith.

For all its irreverence and Dada glossolalia, *WoO* gives an insightful angle into Mormonism as a veritable bishop’s storehouse of cultural and discursive wealth—some of it tithed, some of it plundered and grave-robbed. Mormon readers are reminded of the pragmatic, constructivist paradigms at the historical heart of their tradition. Additionally, I read Angle’s book as an unintentional representation of the experimental metaphysical materialism that Adam Miller describes in *Speculative Grace*. Angle’s development of metaphysical materialism applies its multiplicitous, recombinative, and contingent ontology to authorship in a world where everything is written and writing. In Miller’s account of Latour’s philosophy, “to be an object is to be a politician.”⁹ When we read Angle, we realize that if an object is a politician—negotiating for itself and others in an open, immanent, and representative network of chaotic relationships—then it is a politician of a decidedly nineteenth-century stripe. The object is a mid-west stump-speecher, soap-boxer, half-conman, half-reformer, a Bible in one hand, the Bill of Rights in the other, a bowie-knife between the teeth, all draped about in the banner of heaven, Smith & Rigdon ’44.

Kylan Rice is pursuing his PhD at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, where he studies nineteenth-century American poetics.

9. Miller, *Speculative Grace*, 20.